DANIEL 8

The Ram, the Goat & the Little Horn

Daniel 8 contains one of the most detailed visions in the book of Daniel. The chapter may seem confusing at first because Daniel sees strange animals, horns and kingdoms. But unlike some other visions in Daniel, we are not left completely on our own to determine what the symbols mean. Later in the chapter, the angel Gabriel actually identifies the kingdoms Daniel is seeing.

As you work through this study, pay attention to the sequence of events. Daniel sees kingdoms that had not yet risen to power, and then he sees events that would affect Jerusalem, the temple and the worship of God's people.

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1. DANIEL'S VISION BEGINS

READ DANIEL 8:1–2

Daniel receives this vision during the reign of **Belshazzar**, while Babylon is still the dominant empire.

Daniel sees himself in **Susa**, a city that would later become one of the capitals of the Persian Empire.

That location matters because the first kingdom Daniel is about to see will be **Media and Persia**.

Think About It

Why might it be significant that Daniel sees himself in a future center of Persian power before Persia has even conquered Babylon?

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2. THE RAM AND THE GOAT

READ DANIEL 8:3–8

Daniel first sees a **ram with two horns**.

Both horns are large, but one becomes higher than the other even though it came up later. The ram charges in several directions, and no one is able to stop it.

Then Daniel sees a **male goat coming rapidly from the west**.

The goat has one prominent horn between its eyes. It attacks the ram, breaks its horns and completely defeats it.

The goat becomes incredibly powerful. But while it is still strong, its great horn is suddenly broken.

In place of that one horn, **four horns arise**.

Don't guess what these animals represent yet. Gabriel will tell us later in the chapter.

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3. THE LITTLE HORN

READ DANIEL 8:8–14

Out of the kingdoms represented by the horns comes another ruler, described as a **little horn**.

Daniel tells us several things this ruler will do.

He will:

- Expand his power toward the south, east and the **glorious land**, referring to the land of Judea/Israel.
- Persecute God's people.
- Interfere with the regular sacrifices.
- Desecrate the sanctuary.
- Throw truth to the ground.
- Exalt himself against God.
- Prosper for a period of time.

But his actions will not continue forever.

Daniel hears the question:

How long will this continue?

The answer is **2,300 evenings and mornings**, after which the sanctuary will be restored.

Understanding the 2,300 Evenings and Mornings

There are different ways this expression has been understood.

If it means **2,300 complete days**, the period would be approximately six years and four months.

Because the immediate context concerns the regular sacrifices, which occurred morning and evening, another interpretation understands the number as **2,300 morning and evening sacrifices**, equaling **1,150 days**, or a little over three years.

Whichever interpretation is taken, don't miss where the prophecy ends:

The sanctuary will be restored.

Remember that. It will become important when we look at the history.

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4. GABRIEL EXPLAINS THE VISION

READ DANIEL 8:15–27

Daniel wants to understand what he has seen, and Gabriel is told to explain the vision to him.

Gabriel says the vision concerns the **"time of the end."**

That raises an important question:

The end of what?

Does this necessarily mean the end of the world, or could Gabriel be describing the appointed end of the events Daniel has just seen?

Keep reading because the interpretation itself gives us important clues.

Gabriel specifically identifies the kingdoms:

THE RAM = MEDIA AND PERSIA

THE GOAT = GREECE

THE GREAT HORN = THE FIRST GREAT KING OF THE GREEK EMPIRE

THE FOUR HORNS = FOUR KINGDOMS THAT ARISE FROM THE GREEK EMPIRE

Then Gabriel says that **"at the latter end of their kingdom"** another king will arise.

So now we have a historical sequence we can follow.

5. MEDIA AND PERSIA

The first kingdom is not speculation. Gabriel specifically identifies the ram as **Media and Persia**.

Here is what happened historically:

c. 550 BC: Cyrus of Persia conquered Media.

Media came first, but Persia eventually became the stronger kingdom. This helps us understand Daniel's picture of two horns with the higher horn coming up later.

539 BC: Cyrus conquered Babylon, bringing the Babylonian Empire under Persian rule.

This is important because Daniel received his vision **before Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire**.

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6. WHAT ABOUT THE TEMPLE?

Before moving to Greece, there is an important detail in the vision that we shouldn't overlook.

READ DANIEL 8:11 AGAIN

Daniel sees a future time when the regular sacrifices will be stopped and the sanctuary will be attacked.

But when Daniel received this vision, **the temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by Babylon**.

For Daniel's vision to happen, there would need to be a temple again.

And that is exactly what happened.

The Jews Return and Rebuild

538/537 BC: Cyrus permitted Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

The first group returned under **Zerubbabel**.

536 BC: Work on the second temple began.

Opposition delayed its construction.

516 BC: The second temple was completed and dedicated.

Now the stage was set for what Daniel had seen. There was once again a sanctuary in Jerusalem and sacrifices were being offered.

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7. GREECE AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Gabriel identifies the goat as **Greece**.

The prominent horn represents the first great king of the Greek Empire represented in the vision.

History points us directly toward **Alexander the Great**.

336 BC: Alexander became king of Macedonia at approximately 20 years old.

334 BC: Alexander invaded the Persian Empire from the west.

333 BC: He defeated Darius III at the Battle of Issus.

331 BC: He decisively defeated Persia at the Battle of Gaugamela.

Alexander conquered territory with remarkable speed. That helps us understand Daniel's picture of the goat moving so rapidly that it appeared not to touch the ground.

Within only a few years, Alexander had broken the power of Persia.

His empire eventually stretched from Greece and Egypt into Central Asia and northwestern India.

Then something unexpected happened.

323 BC: Alexander died in Babylon at only 32 years old.

He died while still powerful and planning additional conquests.

Daniel had seen the great horn being broken **while it was strong**.

Alexander also left no established adult heir capable of holding his enormous empire together.

And that leads directly to the next part of Daniel's vision.

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8. THE FOUR KINGDOMS

Daniel saw the great horn broken and **four horns arising in its place**.

Alexander's empire did not immediately divide neatly into four kingdoms. His generals fought for control during what became known as the **Wars of the Successors**.

By approximately **301 BC**, four major kingdoms had emerged:

Cassander — Macedonia and Greece
Lysimachus — Thrace and portions of Asia Minor
Ptolemy — Egypt and portions of Palestine
Seleucus — Syria, Mesopotamia and much of the former Persian territory

None possessed the strength or unity of Alexander's empire.

That corresponds with Daniel 8:22, where Gabriel says four kingdoms will arise from his nation **"but not with his power."**

Now pay close attention to what happens next.

READ DANIEL 8:9

Out of this world of Greek successor kingdoms comes the **little horn**.

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9. ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES

From the **Seleucid Empire** came a ruler named **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**.

When we compare what Daniel says the little horn would do with what Antiochus did historically, the similarities are difficult to ignore.

Antiochus attempted to force **Greek culture and religion** upon the Jewish people.

He **outlawed important Jewish religious practices** and obedience to God's Law.

He **stopped the regular sacrifices** at the temple.

He **desecrated the temple** and dedicated it to Zeus.

He **polluted the altar with pagan sacrifices**, including the sacrifice of pigs.

Jewish people who refused to abandon their faith faced **severe persecution and even death**.

This brings us back to the **2,300 evenings and mornings**.

If these refer to 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices, they represent **1,150 days**, a little over three years. This corresponds closely with the period in which the temple was desecrated and its regular sacrifices were interrupted under Antiochus.

But Daniel didn't only predict the desecration.

He predicted what would happen afterward.

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10. THE SANCTUARY IS RESTORED

Eventually **Judas Maccabeus and the Jewish resistance fought back** against Antiochus's oppression.

In **164 BC**, they regained the temple.

They cleansed it.

They restored its worship.

And they **dedicated it again to God**.

Now go back and read:

READ DANIEL 8:14

Daniel had been told that after the 2,300 evenings and mornings:

The sanctuary would be restored.

The sanctuary had been desecrated, but it would not remain desecrated.

The temple was restored and the sacrifices resumed.

The Jewish people continued to remember this rededication. We know that celebration today as **Hanukkah**, also called the **Feast of Dedication**.

The Feast of Dedication even appears later in the New Testament.

READ JOHN 10:22

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11. WHAT HAPPENED TO ANTIOCHUS?

Daniel gives one more important detail about the little horn.

READ DANIEL 8:25

The ruler would eventually be **"broken—but by no human hand."**

Antiochus did not ultimately die at the hands of Judas Maccabeus or the Jewish resistance.

He died away from Jerusalem.

The ruler who had exalted himself, persecuted God's people and desecrated God's sanctuary eventually came to his end.

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12. ARE THERE OTHER INTERPRETATIONS?

Yes.

Christians and Bible scholars have offered different interpretations of the little horn in Daniel 8.

The prominent historical identification is **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**.

Some futurist interpreters believe the little horn ultimately points to a **future Antichrist**.

Others believe **Antiochus is the historical fulfillment** while also serving as a pattern or foreshadowing of a future enemy of God.

It is important to be fair to those different interpretations.

It is equally important to notice what Daniel 8 itself actually tells us.

Gabriel gives us a sequence:

Media-Persia → Greece → Four Greek Kingdoms → Little Horn

Antiochus arose from the Seleucid kingdom, one of the kingdoms that emerged from Alexander's Greek Empire.

He persecuted God's people.

He stopped the sacrifices.

He desecrated the sanctuary.

The sanctuary was later restored.

And Antiochus came to his end.

Those historical connections explain why Antiochus IV Epiphanes has been so widely identified with the little horn of Daniel 8.

Daniel 8 itself does not explicitly tell us that these events must be repeated by another future ruler. Whether Antiochus also serves as a pattern for something future is a separate interpretive question.

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13. THE BIG PICTURE

Daniel received this vision while **Babylon was still in power**.

Yet the vision looked beyond Babylon.

Media and Persia would rise.

Greece would defeat Persia.

A powerful Greek king would rise and then suddenly fall.

His empire would divide.

From that divided Greek world would arise a ruler who would attack God's people and their worship.

The sanctuary would be desecrated.

But the sanctuary would be restored.

And the ruler who seemed unstoppable would eventually be broken.

Kingdoms rise.

Kingdoms fall.

Rulers become powerful.

Rulers disappear.

But God is not surprised by any of it.

Daniel is seeing history before it happens.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Where did Daniel see himself in the vision, and why would Susa later become important?
2. According to Gabriel, what kingdom does the ram represent?
3. What kingdom does the goat represent?
4. Who fits the description of the goat's prominent horn?
5. What happened to Alexander while he was still powerful?
6. What happened to his empire after his death?
7. From which of the four major successor kingdoms did Antiochus IV Epiphanes arise?
8. What did Daniel say the little horn would do to God's people, the sacrifices and the sanctuary?
9. What similarities do you see between Daniel's description and the actions of Antiochus?
10. What does Daniel say will happen after the 2,300 evenings and mornings?
11. What happened to the temple in 164 BC?
12. What Jewish celebration remembers the rededication of the temple?
13. Why is Antiochus IV Epiphanes such a prominent historical identification of the little horn in Daniel 8?
14. After studying the chapter for yourself, what do you believe Daniel means by **"the time of the end"** in verses 17 and 19? What evidence in the chapter leads you to that conclusion?

FINAL THOUGHT

One of the most important lessons of Daniel 8 is easy to miss if we become consumed with identifying every symbol.

Human kingdoms have limits.

The ram looked unstoppable until the goat arrived.

The goat became exceedingly great until its horn was broken.

The little horn prospered, persecuted and desecrated, but his time also came to an end.

The people of God experienced a terrible season, but even that season had an appointed limit.

The sanctuary would be restored.

Daniel 8 reminds us that what looks unstoppable to us is never beyond the sovereignty of God.