

The Former and Latter Kingdoms

Daniel 8:1-27

Introduction Human history is dark and stained with the deeds of terrible rulers. In modern times, Adolf Hitler's slaughter of Jews, Idi Amin's purging of whole ethnic groups in Uganda, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge's bloody killing fields in Cambodia, Saddam Hussein's massacre of his own people. Over the last ten years, tens of thousands have died in the south of Sudan and the Darfur at the hands of its Muslim government.

Reading the accounts of those great atrocities has been a sobering experience this week. I wanted to hear, feel and smell the grisly site of the monument south of Phnom Penh where bones and skulls are neatly stacked inside a black glass pyramid rising to over 150 feet high. I wanted to see the haunted faces of raped Sudanese Christian women. I wanted to sense the horror of their terrible plight. I wanted this so that this chapter and the horror it predicts does not come out as an academic exposition but rather drips with savage suffering inflicted on God's people.

The Setting

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. And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the capital, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. (Daniel 8:1-2, ESV)

Its time – 3rd year of Belshazzar, so 2 years after the first vision, in the early years of Belshazzar's reign. Its location is very specific. In the vision, he is in Susa, the capital city of Elam. Therefore he is in one of the capital seats of Persia, standing by the Ulai canal. This is meant to convey something and to invoke something:

It is meant to convey that times and seasons are changing. Daniel is living in during the collapse of the Babylonian empire. In his vision he is located in the next empire's capital city and seeing its doom and destruction.

It is meant to invoke a sense of dread over the disasters and destructions that will follow in the train of these next rulers. Dark clouds arise for God's people. The exile and captivity are not the end of their sufferings, nor of ours.

The emphasis of the story and the prophecies now turns to God's people. In the original, Aramaic is now set aside. From this point on, the book is written in Hebrew.

As we come to this message, let's pray as Calvin did:

Grant, Almighty God, since you formerly permitted your servants to maintain their courage in the midst of so many and such heavy commotion, that we may reap the same edification from these prophecies. Since we have fallen upon the fullness of times, may we profit by the examples of the ancient Church, and by the pious and holy admonitions which you have set before us. Thus may we stand firm and unconquered against all the attacks of Satan, and the world, and the impious, and so may our faith remain impregnable, until at length we enjoy the fruit of its victory in thy heavenly kingdom, through Christ our Lord. — Amen.¹²

The Terrible Animals**(v.3-14)**

Daniel has seen a great colossus and grotesque beasts representing the 4 great world empires to come. Now, he will see two more terrible animals and another little horn.

The Wild and Willful Ram**(v.3-4)**

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.

This two horned ram charges out of the east from the bank of the canal. It powerfully overcomes all in its path as it moves to the north, south and west. He simply does what he wants as he triumphs over his opponents. He does exactly what he wants in subjugating them. As a result, he becomes great and stands ascendant over all.

The Swift and Savage Goat**(v.5-8)**

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

In a sudden and shocking savagery, the ram is stunned by the swift appearance and overwhelming power of the horned, male goat. He is driven to the ground to be savagely trampled into sodden pulp in the fierce wrath of the goat. There was no one to save the ram. There were none left to oppose the goat, So he becomes even greater. But at the height of his power and position, his horn is unexpectedly broken to be replaced by four horns arrayed by the four points of the compass.

The Powerful and Prospering Horn**(v.9-12)**

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 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, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.

Once again we see the rise of a little horn. It is like the little horn in Daniel 7 in that it seems to be more than just a great king. There are supernatural overtones. It moves against the kings of the south and the east. It attacks what is called “the glorious land.” It expands its rule even to involving the host of heaven bringing their downfall and defeat. The horn exalts itself to be recognized with the prince of the host, halting the regular burnt offering and overthrowing the sanctuary of

the prince. Because of transgression, a host, or a large number of people, are handed over to it as well as the burnt offering. It will depose truth, do what it pleases and prosper. Whatever this horn is, its power and pride and place are going to be frightening.

The Alarming and Affirming Question (v.13-14)

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, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

The inevitable question is, "How long?" How long will the sanctuary be trampled and the offering cease? Two holy ones, probably referring to angels, ask and answer. The answer is 2,300 evenings and mornings. After that, the sanctuary will be restored to its rightful place.

One new phrase is introduced here, "the transgression that makes desolate". Now we understand that the transgression in verse 12 is not just any sin. It is a definite, desecrating and desolating transgression. From other translations we are familiar with the term, "abomination of desolation". This is the same or a similar "event".

The Troubling Answers (v.15-27)

As we all do, Daniel seeks to understand the vision. He has been given a revelation that is very baffling. Since his earlier visions have been made clear to him, he expects that God will help him understand. So he is confident in God's help.

This is a good point to pause and think about this together. We come to God's Word with a confidence that God is going to help us understand it. We pray for this and then work hard in our study, relying on Him to unfold it to us through all the means He uses. But we also do not presume that God is making clear each and every eschatological text. Exactly what is meant by some of these words and sentences may well be beyond our understanding now. I think we need to be content with that. Much harm is done by attempting to answer all the questions we have with our own wisdom rather than at times saying, "I am not sure... It seems like... God may be showing us that..." This is not hesitancy over the Word of God, but rather over our own frailty. May God continue to bless all as we study His Word.

The Angelic Messenger (v.15-17)

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."

The interpreter sent to help Daniel understand what he has seen is none other than the angel, Gabriel. For the first time in the Bible, he is named. He serves as God's messenger for he will also appear to Joseph and Mary at that great moment of coming of Jesus into the world. As with them, his appearance causes fear and requires assuring.

Gabriel wants him to understand that “the vision is for the time at the end.” These events seen in the vision will be beyond Daniel’s day. They have both a near and far fulfillment. Remember our three horizons? Much prophecy has a near historical fulfillment in events that will unfold. Then it also has a middle horizon around the coming of Christ, the implementation of the New Covenant and the inauguration of the kingdom. Then it has a far horizon in the culmination of the kingdom when Jesus returns in His glory.

Now, these three horizons are not *taught* here but they can be observed here. It is a helpful way to account for the multi-fulfillment of these prophecies. So the Christ-centeredness of the Bible is evident even in the way the prophecies are unfolded. They do involve other great personages, empires, figures and events. But they all a part of the long trajectory towards the great day of His return.

The Interpreting Message

(v.18-26)

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 is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. ²² As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his 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. 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. 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. 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.”

Daniel seems to have been overcome and fainted. He is awakened by the angel and then stood up on his feet. Then, in a few words, Gabriel interprets the vision for him and for us. Now, living on the other side of the cross and resurrection, living between the second and third horizons, we can see more clearly how these prophecies unfolded.

The ram represents the Media and Persian Empire. The ram is defeated by the swift and sudden military power of the goat. This goat represents Greece and Alexander the Great. With power and elegance, with military prowess and lightning tactics, Alexander swept across the known world beginning in 344 BC. He extended his rule from southern Europe to India. Unexpectedly, at the age of 32, he died with complications from malaria and alcoholism in 323 BC in Babylon. Within a few years, the kingdom is divided among his four generals. They divide the kingdom into four kingdoms and were unable to sustain the power and prestige Alexander had brought. At the end of their time, the four horns are broken and destroyed by a little horn that arises.

Gabriel says that in the latter days, there would arise a stern and cunning king, a master of deceit and intrigue. He would become powerful, devastating all who stood in his way. He would vent particular ire on the Jews and the city of Jerusalem. He would destroy the leadership of both the city and the temple. He would

desecrate the temple, would forbid the observance of all the Levitical worship and sometimes would force Jewish citizens to eat pork. He was a vicious and vile conqueror.

This little horn is known to us in history as Antiochus Epiphanies. He came to power in 175 BC. Five years later, he first attacked and conquered Egypt. On his way back in 170 BC, he subdued Israel. 2 years later, he returned to Egypt only to have Rome eject him. In 168 BC, he set out to conquer Israel and make it a buffer between him and Rome. One commentator reports, “The Jews were forbidden to follow the Mosaic Law in observing the Sabbath, their annual feasts, and traditional sacrifices, and circumcision of children (cf. v. 11). Altars to idols were set up in Jerusalem and on December 16, 167 B.C. the Jews were ordered to offer unclean sacrifices and to eat swine’s flesh or be penalized by death.”¹³ Another commentator says, “He abolished the daily morning and evening sacrificial offerings (11; cf. Ex. 29:38–43) and committed the blasphemy of sacrificing a pig on the altar of burnt offering, later placing a statue of Zeus in the temple and making human sacrifices on the altar. He forbade circumcision and profaned the Sabbath (cf. vs 11–12).”¹⁴

Antiochus Epiphanies’ first incursion into Jerusalem was in 170 BC. He desecrated the Temple in December 16, 167 BC Judas Maccabeus restored Jerusalem and the temple in 164 BC.. If the 2,300 mornings and evenings refer to days, then it is fulfilled in the period of Jerusalem’s subjugation, around 6 years and 70 days. If it is referring to 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices, then it is fulfilled in the period of the Temple’s desecration, which is around 1,150 days. While commentators tend to choose one over the other, it seems to me that it is simply both. In an elegant piece of language, two periods of time are referred to and the fulfillment covers both political defeat and religious desecration.

But there is more here. Someone else is also foreshadowed here. Beyond the near horizon of Antiochus Epiphanies looms the specter of one who will rise in the last days to kill God’s people, destroy and desecrate their sanctuary and prosecute open warfare on God. He will be controlled by another, namely Satan. By cunning and deceit he will succeed and bringing the whole world under his sway. But then, at the height of his power and prestige, he will be smashed but not by human hands.

The Overwhelmed Minister

(v.27)

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.

What a response to this great revelation and its interpretation. What a far cry from our eschatological curiosities. He understands the gravity of what is going to unfold and the grief it will cause. He is appalled. He does not understand it.

But, he goes about the king’s business. Dreadful and fell events may yet unfold from the fabric of these prophecies. We may suddenly have an inward sense of the strife, suffering and martyrdom it will bring. But today, we go about our daily work and required business. Why? Because this chapter is not the end of the story – there is O so much more to come.

Reflect and Respond

One author has so helpfully applied this vision to us in these words:

The emphasis on Daniel understanding this vision is noteworthy. This illumination is not only a matter of foreknowledge of the events of history but also of insight into the nature and working of evil in its destruction of life, its opposition to godliness, [...] its focus on destroying the worship of the people of God, its falsehood and its pride. In the light of this Daniel learns vital lessons: that no-one should allow themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security, and that God will ultimately destroy all opposition to himself.¹⁵

Too many are looking for national leaders like Alexander the great – young, suave, handsome, winsome, confident, quick to conquer, yet imperfect and flawed. What they get are leaders like Antiochus Epiphanies – vain, vicious, vile, hating God and His people, stamping on them and shaking their fist at God. May we never look to such for our surety or security. Suffering is almost sure to follow in their train.

We are to take courage and comfort that texts like this are not the end of the story. Jesus Christ Himself will destroy His enemies and ours. The fierce opposition of the nations, the little horn, the wild goat may bring suffering. But, in the midst of that suffering how sweet the deliverance He brings.

We are not looking for the rise of the antichrist. This is not the focus of the Christian hope. It may be one data point that tells us that Jesus' coming is near. But it is Christ to whom we look and for whom we long. Listen as one of the great black preachers of yesteryear, Dr. S. M. Lockridge, turns our gaze to Christ so that we will be found in Him at His coming.

*No barrier can hinder Him from pouring out His blessing.
He's enduringly strong;
He's entirely sincere;
He's eternally steadfast;
He's immortally graceful;
He's imperially powerful;
He's impartially merciful.
He's the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizon of this world.
He's God's Son. He's a sinner's Savior.
He's the centerpiece of civilization.
I'm trying to tell you, Church—You can trust Him!*

*He does not have to call for help, and you can't confuse Him.
He doesn't need you and He doesn't need me.
He stands alone in the solitude of Himself.
He's august and He's unique.
He's unparalleled; He's unprecedented;
He's supreme and preeminent.
He's the loftiest idea in literature.
He's the highest personality in philosophy.
He's the supreme problem of higher criticism.
He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology.
He's the cardinal necessity of spiritual religion.
He's the miracle of the age.*

*He's the superlative of everything good that you can call Him.
I'm trying to tell you—you can trust Him!*

*He can satisfy all of our needs and He can do it simultaneously.
He supplies strength for the weak.
He's available for the tempted and tried;
He sympathizes and He sees.
He guards and He guides.
He heals the sick. He cleansed the lepers.
He forgives sinners.
He discharges debtors;
He delivers captives.
He defends the feeble;
He blesses the young.
He guards the aged;
He rewards the diligent.
He beautifies the meek.
I'm trying to tell you—you can trust Him!*

*He's the key to knowledge.
He's the wellspring of wisdom.
He's the doorway of deliverance.
He's the pathway to peace.
He's the roadway to righteousness.
He's the highway to holiness.
He's the gateway to glory.
You can trust Him.*

*He's the Master of the mighty.
He's the Captain of the conquerors.
He's the Head of the heroes.
He's the Leader of legislators.
He's the Overseer of the overcomers.
He's the Governor of Governors.
He's the Prince of princes.
He's the King of kings.
He's the Lord of lords.
You can trust Him.*

*His office is manifold.
His promise is sure.
His life is matchless.
His goodness is limitless.
His mercy is everlasting.
His love never changes.
His Word is enough.
His grace is sufficient.
His reign is righteous.
His yoke is easy.
His burden is light.*

*I wish I could describe Him to you!
He's indescribable because He's incomprehensible.
He's irresistible and He's invincible.
You can't get Him off your hands.
You can't get Him out of your mind.
You can't outlive Him
And you can't live without Him.*

*Death couldn't handle Him.
And thank God, the grave couldn't hold Him.
There was nobody before Him.
There will be nobody after Him.
He had no predecessor,
And He'll have no successor.
You can't impeach Him,
And He's not going to resign.
You can trust Him!*¹⁶

So Romans 8:31-39 comforts and encourages us in challenging times.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notes

¹² John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Daniel*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

¹³ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 1:1358.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, Rev. Ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd Ed. / Edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Da 8:9.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Da 8:9.

¹⁶ Rodney Stortz and R. Kent Hughes, *Daniel : The Triumph of God's Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 141.