

Daniel 8:1-27

Introduction

After spending quite a bit of time in that central, pivotal chapter of Daniel (chapter 7), we come this morning to the second vision (out of four) that make up the second half of Daniel. Daniel received the first vision (the four beasts, the Ancient of Days, the one like a son of man) in the first year of Belshazzar. Now we read in chapter eight:

I. Daniel 8:1-3 — In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar (about 550 B.C.) 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 citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal.

Susa was a city about 200 miles straight east from Babylon. At the time of this vision, it was a fortified city and the capital city of the province of Elam, but it wasn't of any royal importance. Later on, though, Susa would be the capital of the Persian Empire. So we go on to read in verse three:

II. Daniel 8:3 (cf. 8:20) — 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.

Just like in Daniel's last vision, there are beasts in this vision, but this time they're not quite so "beastly" or monstrous looking. In Hebrew, the word for "ram" can also be used to refer to "leaders," or "mighty men," or "chiefs."

- Exodus 15:15 — Trembling seizes the **leaders [rams]** of Moab.
- Ezekiel 31:11 — I will give [the tree] into the hand of a **mighty one [a ram]** of the nations.
- Ezekiel 32:21 (cf. 17:13) — The mighty **chiefs [rams]** shall speak... out of the midst of Sheol.

The rams were the leaders of the flock and their horns were the sign that they were the ones in charge. So this ram symbolizes someone or something that has authority and power on the earth. This isn't a random symbol picked out of thin air. We're told that the ram had two horns, and that both horns were "*high*," but that one horn was higher than the other, and that the higher one came up last. The angel explains in verse twenty:

- Daniel 8:20 — As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia.

"Before Cyrus came to the throne of Persia, the Medes had dominated the Persians. When Cyrus came to the throne he overthrew his Median grandfather... and took over the united kingdoms of Media and Persia... [Therefore,] Cyrus and his [Persian] successors are the longer, second horn that came up later and overshadowed the Median kingdom." (Steinmann) In chapter seven the

Medo-Persian empire was represented as a *bear* raised up on one side and having three ribs in its mouth. There, it was the second in a series of four kingdoms (Babylon; Medo-Persia; Greece; Rome). Here in chapter eight, it's the first of only two empires (just the two middle ones from chapter seven). So Daniel goes on, now, to describe what he saw the ram doing:

III. Daniel 8:4 — 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.

The ram comes *from* the east, so we see it charging westward and northward and southward. But more importantly, what we see is a power that's apparently irresistible – a power before which everyone and everything inevitably falls. “No beast could stand before him... there was no one who could rescue from his power.”

“He did as he pleased,” Daniel says, “and became *great*.” This isn't a “neutral” greatness; it's a conceited, arrogant, self-exalting “greatness.” On the one hand, “he did as he pleased and became great” is a description of man's wicked arrogance and apparently unchecked power. On the other hand, can you already hear—ironically, in those same words—the approaching defeat of the ram? We all know the proverb that says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Sometimes, this destruction is meted out by God as a direct punishment, but it's also true that pride contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. We can see this principle at work in many ways, but in the case of an empire like Persia, the more proud a people (or a leader) becomes, the more greedy they tend to get and the more they overextend themselves until finally they've stretched their necks out too far; and then their fall is just as inevitable as all their previous “inevitable” victories. We can be reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians: “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (10:12). Here in Daniel, it's this principle that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall that strengthens and encourages God's people – who suffer at the hands of the proud and are oppressed by those haughty in spirit. So we go on to read:

IV. Daniel 8:5-7 — 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. 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. 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.

While Daniel's still occupied with trying to make sense of the ram, all of a sudden, “behold, a male goat coming from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground...” In the Bible, male goats also symbolized powerful leaders and rulers – for the same reason that rams did. It was the male goats that went at the head of the flock and whose horns signified that they were the ones in charge.

□ **Jeremiah 50:8** — Go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as male goats before the flock.

□ Zechariah 10:3 (cf. Ezek. 34:17; 39:18) — My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders [the male goats].
So once again, this imagery isn't random.

The goat coming from the west represents the Greeks (cf. the leopard in chapter seven) and the conspicuous horn represents Alexander the Great whose capital city was originally in the far western territory of Macedonia. Alexander was enraged against the Persians because they had taken over some Greek cities. After liberating those cities, Alexander continued his campaign and in a period of only three years, the mighty Persian empire was no more.

This reversal is so sudden and so complete—it's almost disorienting. How can we read in verse four, "No beast could stand before [the ram]" and then only three verses later, "The ram had no power to stand before the male goat"? How can we read in verse four, "There was no one who could rescue from [the ram's] power," and then only three verses later in verse seven, "There was no one who could rescue the ram from [the goat's] power"? It's like we really just need to take a deep breath and try to process what we're hearing. But there's no time for that, is there? Because no sooner has the ram been cast to the ground and trampled than we read in the first part of verse eight:

V. Daniel 8:8a — Then the goat became exceedingly great...

In verse four it was the ram who "did as he pleased and *became great*." Remember how on the one hand, those words were a description of man's wicked arrogance and apparently unchecked power. But then remember how on the other hand, we could hear already—in those same words—the guarantee of the ram's destruction. So what is it that we hear now, when Daniel says not just that the goat did as he pleased and became great, but that it became "exceedingly great"? On the one hand, there's something even more fearful in these words. On the other hand, do we also hear in these same words the guarantee of the goat's fall? Contained in all of man's pride and self-exalting greatness is always the *seed* of his own destruction. And so we go on to read in the rest of verse eight:

VI. Daniel 8:8 (cf. 8:21-22) — 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.

No sooner had Alexander the Great defeated the previously irresistible might of the Persian Empire than Alexander died—at the very height of his power—and his empire was divided up between four of his generals. The angel explains in verses 21-22:

□ Daniel 8:21-22 — The goat is the king[dom] of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. 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.

And once again, we're left essentially just trying to catch our breath. There's the rise and the fall, and then the rise and the fall. And then there's another, even more terrifying rise than any of the ones that came before it. We read in verses 9-10:

VII. Daniel 8:9-10 — Out of one of them [out of one of the four conspicuous horns] came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. 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.

Notice the theme of “greatness”; and notice, too, that there's a sense in which we've been building all along to this point. The ram did as he pleased and became “great.” The goat with the single conspicuous horn became “exceedingly great.” But now this “little horn” achieves a “greatness” that seems to far outstrip all the others.

This “little horn” is Antiochus Epiphanes who became the king of the Seleucid Empire 150 years *after* Alexander the Great (in 175 B.C.) Maybe he's called a “little horn” because he wasn't the true heir to the throne. He usurped the throne from his nephew. But I think he's also called a “little horn” in order to remind us of that *other* “little horn” that we've already seen in chapter seven – the one that will come even later in the days of the fourth kingdom.

Daniel says he saw this little horn grow exceedingly great toward the south (Egypt), toward the east (Persia), **and toward the glorious land**. It's with these last words that the vision seems to suddenly enter into a whole new dimension, as it were. The glorious—or the *beautiful*—land is the land of Israel; and why was that land so beautiful and so glorious? Because it's the land where God chose to dwell in the midst of His people by putting His own glorious name in the temple at Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 48:1-3). In chapter eleven, we'll hear about the “glorious [or “beautiful”] holy mountain” (11:45). The land is glorious because the God whose name is glorious has put His name there. So now we begin to see why the “greatness” of this little horn is said to far outstrip all who came before him. On the one hand, the power of Antiochus was never equal to the power of Alexander the Great (cf. 8:22), or even to the Persian kings before Alexander. But we know by now that the meaning of “greatness” in this chapter isn't just about military might. The real meaning is a conceited, arrogant, self-exalting kind of “greatness.” And where we always see this self-exalting greatness the most clearly is whenever man exalts himself *the most directly* against *God* and against *His people* and against *His worship*. Daniel sees this horn growing exceedingly great toward the south *generally*, and toward the east *generally*, and then—most importantly—toward the glorious land *specifically*.

And now, suddenly, the setting of Daniel's vision changes; we move from the earth into the cosmic realm of the heavens. The little horn “grew *great* [there's that word again], 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. I believe what Daniel's seeing here is the people of Israel (cf. Exod. 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 41, 51) in the light of who they really are as God's covenant people. If the land is glorious because the name of God is there, then the people have a certain glory, too, because God has put His name upon them. They're compared to the host of the stars in heaven because the God who dwells in the heavens is the one who has chosen them for Himself. In Daniel 12, an angel tells

Daniel that at the time of the end “those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (12:3). In the eyes of the world, God’s people are despised and scorned as of little or no account. But that’s because who they really are—who *we* really are—is still veiled and hidden. The world, of course, doesn’t see in God’s people glorious shining stars in the heavens, but it’s precisely this invisible reality that Daniel does see in his vision; and it’s precisely this invisible reality that shows just *how* “great” and just *how* arrogant the little horn has grown to be. Daniel says: “It grew exceedingly great... toward the glorious land... 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.”

VIII. Daniel 8:11 — 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.

In the Old Testament there are times when we see a being or a person who appears to be distinct from God, and yet is still treated as apparently equal with God. It’s in places like these that it seems we have preincarnate appearances of the Son, or the “Word” – the second person of the Trinity.

□ Joshua 5:13–15 (cf. Exod. 23:20-21) — Joshua... lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him... And the commander of the LORD’s host said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.”

I believe it’s this same divine being in Joshua 5 that we have here in Daniel chapter eight – the “Prince of the host”; in verse 25 He’s called the “Prince of princes.” So is Daniel saying that this little horn became just as *mighty* and just as *powerful* as God? No. What he’s saying is that the horn *arrogantly exalted itself* to be as “*great*” as the Prince of the host (cf. 8:25); and he did this not only by trampling the *people* of this Prince, but also by taking away from Him the regular burnt offering and by overthrowing the place of His sanctuary. Looking back, we see how all these things were fulfilled in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. “Epiphanes” is a word that refers to the manifestation of a deity. Antiochus even had coins minted with these words engraved on them: “King Antiochus, God Manifest.” In the end, even though the temple wasn’t physically destroyed, the worship of God at the temple was overthrown when Antiochus not only forbade the Jews from offering sacrifices but even ordered that a pagan idol be set up on the temple altar and that unclean animals (likely pigs) be offered to that idol in sacrifice (1 Macc. 1:44-47, 59; 2 Macc. 6:4). And so the little horn “became great, even as *great* (at least in his own mind; cf. 8:25) as the Prince of the host.” Finally, we read in verse 12:

IX. Daniel 8:12 — And a host [the Prince’s host] will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering [or: “a host (an enemy host) will be set over the regular burnt offering] because of [or “during the”] transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.

It’s impossible to know for sure how to translate this verse, but I think the “transgression” that Daniel’s talking about here is the transgression of the “little horn.” We know it’s the “little horn”

that will throw God's truth to the ground. The author of 1 Maccabees tells us how these words were very literally fulfilled:

1 Maccabees 1:56–57 — The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king.

Finally, at the end of all this description of the little horn's transgression and rebellion, we read: "And it [the little horn] will act and prosper." Do you hear an echo in these words of the description of the ram in verse four—"He did as he pleased and became great"? Only now that ram might seem to be gentle and tame in comparison. On the one hand, the little horn seems overwhelmingly invincible. On the other hand, if pride contains within itself the seed of its own destruction, then surely the fate of this little horn must be sealed. But how long will it be? How long will the host of heaven be cast down and trampled? How long will the temple be desolate? How long will this little horn exalt itself to be as great as the Prince of the host? How long will truth be thrown to the ground? How long?

X. Daniel 8:13-14 — 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?" And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

The regular burnt offering was offered every day, one in the evening at twilight and one in the morning (cf. Exod. 29:38-42; Num. 28:3-4, 10). So it's possible that 2,300 evenings and mornings refers to 2,300 of these twice daily burnt offerings which would then equal 1,150 days (approximately three years and two months). On the other hand, the reference could be to 2,300 evenings and 2,300 mornings (cf. Gen. 3:5) and so be approximately six years and four months. In either case, and whether this is a rounded number or an exact number, the main point—and the steadying and encouraging point—was clear. "How long?" "For 2,300 evenings and mornings." When things are as terrible as Daniel has described, this might seem like an eternity. But the days *will* run their course and they *will* come to their end, and then the temple worship *will* be restored. And so God's people are called to patiently endure until that promised end comes.

XI. Daniel 8:15-19 — 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. And I heard a man's voice [or a voice sounding like a man's voice] between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man **understand** the vision." 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." 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. He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation [fury], for it refers to the appointed time of the end."

Did you see the emphasis on *understanding*? Do you remember what this understanding really is? It's not just the ability to interpret the details of the vision. It's certainly not just having a "head knowledge" of what will happen in the future (or for us, in the past). The ultimate point of understanding the vision is wisdom and insight. And so the first thing we're to *understand* is that this vision is for the time of the end – Daniel says "the latter end *of the indignation*." I believe this "indignation" isn't ultimately God's indignation, but rather the fury and the raging of the nations during the time of Israel's exile (Dan. 8:4, 6-7, 10-12; Hos. 7:16; Isa. 10:5-19; 47:5-7; Zech. 1:12-17; cf. 1 Macc. 1:62-64). And so "the latter end" of this indignation refers to how the nations' raging will finally be turned once more in full force against the people of God and therefore even against God Himself in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. On the one hand, there's a sense in which the arrogant fury of the nations is unceasing even in their warring against one another (think of the ram and the goat). But there's also a sense in which at various times that fury and that self-exalting arrogance manifests itself in the most ultimate way; when sin itself seems to be personified in a single nation or government, or even in a single man's attack upon the people of God; when the "transgression" of the world reaches its "limit" (v. 23), as it were, exalting itself even against God Himself, attacking His worship, and throwing His truth to the ground. We know the "time of the end" in Daniel 8 has already come and gone in the second century B.C., and yet there's a sense in which this "*end*" will keep on repeating itself at various times and in various places until Jesus returns (cf. Hab. 2:3; the "little horn" in Daniel 7). What's the point of knowing this? The Apostle John answers:

□ Revelation 13:10b (cf. 14:12) — Here is a call [not for despair or for giving up hope, but a call] for the endurance and faith of the saints.

As Christians, we're called over and over again in the Scriptures to endurance – to a patient, steadfast endurance that bears up under suffering and persecution and bears fruit *to the end* (Mat. 24:13; Lk. 8:11-15).

When we come to the angel's interpretation of the "little horn" his words are just as "fearful" as ever. And yet when we listen carefully, there's also a comforting assurance:

XII. Daniel 8:23-25a — At the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors [or, "transgressions"] have reached their limit [or, "fullness"], a king of bold face, one who understands riddles [who is wise in a cunning or crafty way], shall arise. 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. 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 [1 Macc. 1:29-30]. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes...

Brothers and sisters, was this a call to despair? Was this a call to give up all hope and be paralyzed with fear? Certainly not. In fact, it's exactly the opposite. "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints." Because even though "his power *shall* be great," this will not be by his own power. That might sound like a contradiction, but the point is simple: Even the "little horn" draws breath only because God daily gives it to him. The "greatness" of *every* little

horn is always “*in his own mind*.” The self-exalting arrogance of every “little horn” is always, in the end, the seed of its own destruction. And so at the end of the long litany of this king’s wickedness, and lies, and arrogance, and oppression, we read without any fanfare at all—and almost abruptly—these simple words:

XIII. Daniel 8:25b — ...and he shall be broken—but by no human hand.

There’s the rise and the fall, and then the rise and the fall. And then, at the time of “the end,” another more terrifying rise than any of the ones that came before it. And then – the fall. And so what God’s people are always, *always* called to is a patient endurance. To endure and to bear up under suffering and persecution *to the end*. That’s the real meaning of the angel’s last words to Daniel:

XIV. Daniel 8:26 — The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is *true*, but seal up the vision [preserve it and keep it safe for a future generation], for it refers to many days from now.

At the end of the book of Revelation, the Apostle John tells us how an angel said something very different to him:

□ Revelation 22:10 — He said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”

In other words, while Daniel eight speaks of things still far off, the events of the book of Revelation concerned that very first generation of Christians – the Christians alive when John first wrote. And so they’ve also concerned every generation since then in these days of imminence and delay. In the end, the career of the “beasts” and the “horns” is always a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Finally, we read in verse 27:

XV. Daniel 8:27 — 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.

Daniel said almost the same thing at the end of chapter seven.

□ Daniel 7:28 — As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.

So what is it that Daniel doesn’t “*understand*”? How can the future still hold so much suffering for God’s people? Wasn’t the exile supposed to last seventy years (cf. 9:2)? And wasn’t the exile supposed to be followed by a glorious restoration and then!—The Messiah’s kingdom? How can the future still hold so much suffering for God’s people? The answer to that question—the answer that will give us true “insight and wisdom”—will come in chapter 9 when we learn that even Israel’s Messiah must suffer (cf. 9:20-27).

For right now, it's enough to know that this suffering will come, and that this simple knowledge is intended not as a call to despair, but always as a call to endurance – to endure patiently, faithfully, to the end, in hope.

- Romans 5:3–4 — We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.