

A tourist was driving on a long road through West Texas and he stopped at a gas station where he noticed a small piece of rope hanging from the porch, and under the rope was a sign which read 'weather forecaster'.

"How does this work?", he asked the station attendant. "Well," the attendant replied, "When it swings, it's windy. When it's wet, that means rain. When it's stiff, it means ice and snow, and when it's gone – well, there's a tornado."

Some things are pretty obvious, and as we have seen thus far in the book of **Daniel** – it's pretty obvious that God is sovereign over all. That's the theme of this book. God knows the beginning and the end of every circumstance. God sees the ancient times and the future times at the same time, and according to His good will, according to His time – it is He who establishes kings and kingdoms, and it is He who removes them. Rulers may hit the world stage and they may strut their stuff, but make no mistake – God raises them up for a purpose, and He takes them down according to His plans.

This morning, we are continuing to work our way through the book of **Daniel**, and if you recall from last week, we entered the prophetic section of this book that is filled with all kinds of imagery and symbolism which makes this section somewhat challenging – and true to form, this next chapter is no exception. It's somewhat challenging.

Now, before we jump into **Daniel 8** – that's where we are, I need to mention that it's here we move from the common Aramaic language that started back in **Chapter 2**, and we return to the Hebrew language which will be used for the remainder of the book. We are not told why the switch, but I think Daniel has come back to the Hebrew language – the language of the Jews, because from this point on in the book, he is primarily focused on Israel and what lies ahead for her.

So, if you have your Bible turn to **Daniel 8** and we will begin with **verse 1**, where Daniel has another flashback to a vision he had many years before.

¹In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously. ²I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal.

In the third year of Belshazzar – it's 551 B.C., Daniel had another vision. In his vision – a prophetic vision, Daniel finds himself in **Susa**. Now at the time of his

vision, Susa was a little-known town some 200 miles east of Babylon. At the time, it wouldn't even rate a dot on a map, but later this little town will become the future winter capital of the next empire, and if you remember in our study through the book of **Esther** – Susa was a capital city of the Persian Empire. Ten or so years before the Babylonian Empire will fall, Daniel already sees himself in the **citadel of Susa** – a fortress which hasn't even been built yet.

So, in his vision, standing by a canal the Persians would also later build, Daniel sees something else. Let's continue beginning with **verse 3**.

³ Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. ⁴ I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

Fortunately for us, we don't need to try to figure out the symbolism of this powerful **ram**, because later in **verse 20**, the angel Gabriel shows up – he's mentioned by name, and he explains to Daniel that this ram represents the Medo-Persia Empire who is to come next.

In his vision of the ram, we are told that one of these **two horns** was longer than the other, and history confirms that this union between the Medes and the Persians was unbalanced. The Persians were the stronger force in this union, they were dominate, and they would eventually swallow up the Medes.

Under Persian rule – King Cyrus and his successors would extend their empire to the north, to the south, and to the west – their power was great and they did what they wanted – to include some good things like allowing the exiled Jews to leave Babylon to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple and the city of Jerusalem.

For quite a while – for over 200 years, the Persians ruled. They appeared unbeatable with an army of two and a half million soldiers – no one could stand against them – no one – that is until our sovereign God had other plans for them, and beginning with **verse 5** we are told,

⁵ While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had

a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶ He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. ⁷ I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power.

Once again, we are very fortunate, because later in **verse 21**, the angel Gabriel explains that this **male goat** coming from the west with the one horn between its eyes is Greece. It's the Grecian Empire under the rule of Alexander the Great.

Now, think about this for a moment. At the time of his vision in 551 B.C., Daniel was still living under Babylonian rule. Then in 539 B.C., history tells us that the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon, and they in turn would rule the known world for over 200 years – but here Daniel is already looking well past them to the Greeks who at the time were nothing. They were nothing, but sure enough, it all happened exactly as Daniel said it would happen.

Under the rule of Alexander, the Greeks conquered the known world, and they did it with such cunning, and with such speed, that Daniel pictured them as not even **touching the ground** – and with a much smaller army, in several fierce battles, they trampled the once unbeatable Persians.

The ram is dead – long live the goat; however, at the pinnacle of power, the unthinkable happens. Let's continue with **verse 8** where we read,

Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

Alexander had conquered the known world and with that, the Greek culture and the Greek language was established throughout his empire. Alexander wanted to Hellenize the whole world so that all people would know how they were supposed to live, and ironically, he had no way of knowing that the New Testament would be written in Greek. Alexander thought he was doing his own thing, and yet behind the scenes – all along, God was preparing for the ministry and the gospel message of His Son Jesus Christ – to truly show people how they are supposed to live.

Anyway, at the age of 33, at the height of his reign, Alexander died – the great horn was **broken**, and in his place came up four noticeable horns. You see,

Alexander had no heir to the throne, and so eventually, four of his generals divided up the empire amongst themselves. These four generals became kings and they formed kingdoms out of the empire that Alexander had created.

- Cassander ruled over Macedonia and Greece
- Lysimachus ruled over Thrace which is modern day Bulgaria and Turkey, and also Asia Minor
- Ptolemy ruled the region around Egypt, and
- Seleucus ruled over the vast territory to the east.

Now, of these kings – Ptolemy and Seleucus are the ones that become significant to the Jews, because these two kings and their successors battle over a little piece of land right between their two territories – it's the region of Palestine which includes Israel. It was a very unstable time for the Jews who were caught in the middle, but eventually, the Seleucids under their sixth ruler – King Antiochus III finally gains control of the region.

Fortunately for the Jews, Antiochus III was favorable towards them. He lowered taxes, he made donations to their temple, and he let the Jews govern themselves according to their own Mosaic law. Things were going well for the Jews – as well as could be expected under foreign rule, but it doesn't last long, and that brings us to **verse 9** where this vision of Daniel takes a terrible turn.

⁹ Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. ¹⁰ It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. ¹¹ It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. ¹² And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper.

Okay, before anyone jumps to conclusions, let me say this **small horn** is not the same little horn we talked about last week in **Chapter 7** – who we learned is the Antichrist still yet to come.

This one is not the Antichrist and we shouldn't try to force that idea here – but with that said, if you want an image of what the coming Antichrist will be like, if you need a picture, if you want to see the prototype – then here's your guy.

So, a few moments ago, I told you about King Antiochus III who was favorable towards the Jews – well, he had a son – Antiochus IV, who rose from obscurity after the murder of his older brother, and in 175 B.C. – some 375 years after Daniel’s vision, he seized the throne and the power that came with it.

Antiochus IV was a diabolical king who plunged Israel – the **Beautiful Land**, into one of her darkest times in history. This king was a madman who gave himself the name *Epiphanes* for he claimed to be a revelation – an epiphany of the gods. He magnified himself and demanded worship by those under his dominion – in effect, claiming equality with God.

Antiochus Epiphanes, unlike his father, hated the Jews with a passion. He was bitter and ruthless towards God’s priests and God’s people, and through brutal persecution, he tried to stamp out their culture and religion to turn the Jews into good Greeks. For example, he issued a decree that there would only be one religion in his realm and it wouldn’t be the Jewish religion. Antiochus drove out the Jewish high priest and replaced him with someone willing to compromise and speak on his behalf. He prohibited the Jews from observing the Sabbath and he put a stop to Scripture reading – burning every copy of the Torah he could find.

Antiochus outlawed the circumcision of males and the story is told of two mothers who were determined to circumcise their baby boys. When Antiochus heard about it, he took the babies and gutted them, hung them around each mother’s neck and marched the women through the streets of Jerusalem to the highest wall and made them jump to their deaths.

He decreed that the Jewish dietary restrictions were no longer valid, and it is said that Antiochus arrested a mother and her seven sons, and tried to force them to eat pork. They wouldn’t do it, and the angry king gave orders to strip the skin off the heads of these sons, and then one by one, they were thrown alive into a large hot frying pan as their mother watched them die in agony.

This is the way it was for the Jews under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. It was reported that he killed some one hundred thousand Jews and sold another forty thousand into slavery, but it all came to a head in 168 B.C. when Antiochus returned in defeat from Alexandria, and in his fury, he ordered the temple in Jerusalem to be seized. He carried off the golden candlesticks, the table of shewbread, the altar of incense, and other various sacred vessels. He then set up an idol to Jupiter in the middle of the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar – sprinkling the pig’s blood all over the sanctuary.

There was nothing more horrible to the Jews than to have their holy place profaned by the blood of an unclean animal, and as a result, the regular sacrifices stopped because the temple was desecrated. In **verses 13 and 14** – in his vision, Daniel overhears a conversation about this troubling time.

¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, “How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?” ¹⁴ He said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored.”

In Daniel’s vision, the question is asked, “*how long is this going to occur*” and it is told that the regular temple sacrifices will cease for **2,300 evenings and mornings**, and afterwards, they will be restored. Now, Bible students debate if this means 2,300 days (which is short of seven years) or 1,150 days (which is approximately three and a half years) as two sacrifices were regularly performed each day – one in the morning and one in the evening. Now, I’m not certain how to interpret this – essentially, it all depends on when you think the clock starts, but one thing is for certain – it comes to an end in 164 B.C., and let me tell you what happened.

In those days of persecution, there was an old priest named Mattathias, who lived in a town outside of Jerusalem. He grieved over the sorrow of his people, and one day a government official representing Antiochus came to the place where Mattathias lived and said, “*You are ordered to offer sacrifices to the Greek gods.*” Well, Mattathias refused to do it, and when another Jew stepped forward to do so, Mattathias slew the Jew and then slew the government official who gave the order, and a spark of rebellion was lit.

Well, the old priest died, but he passed the torch to his son Judas Maccabeus. Judas and his sons set off a great rebellion and led the people of Israel to retake Jerusalem, cleanse their temple, and restore the regular sacrifices.

According to tradition, when Judas went to cleanse and reconsecrate temple, the first thing he wanted to do was find oil to light the lamps – as the ceremony to reconsecrate the temple would take eight days. Well, he found only one small container of oil, and he knew that wouldn’t be enough to last all that time, but as tradition goes, that small amount of oil lasted for the entire eight days. To this day, the Jewish people celebrate to mark their victory and the reconsecration of their temple, and they call it *Hanukkah*, which goes right back to this time in history revealed in the book of **Daniel**.

So, what happened to Antiochus Epiphanes? Well, according to the Jewish book of 2 Maccabees, the story goes that Antiochus was elsewhere when he hears about the rebellion in Jerusalem. In his anger, he declares he's going to turn Jerusalem into a Jewish graveyard, and after making that declaration, he fell out of his chariot in terrible pain. He was picked up, and as he's carried in a litter, his bowels burst open with worms. His suffering was great, the stench from his body was unbearable – and in misery, he died a few days later – and just like that, the diabolical king was gone.

Okay, we are almost done. Indirectly, we have already covered **verses 15** through **22** which gives us the interpretation of what we have just looked at – so let's jump ahead to this last portion which I think is very interesting – for I think it's here, that we are presented with a dual prophecy – a prophecy with two applications.

You may or may not know this, but some prophecy in the Bible may have a *near fulfillment* current to the time when the prophecy is given – but at the same time, it can also point forward to a *farther* or *greater fulfillment* in the future – and that's what I think we have here. Beginning with **verse 23**, we are told,

**²³ “In the latter period of their rule,
When the transgressors have run their course,
A king will arise,
Insolent and skilled in intrigue.
²⁴ “His power will be mighty, but not by his own power,
And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree
And prosper and perform his will;
He will destroy mighty men and the holy people.
²⁵ “And through his shrewdness
He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence;
And he will magnify himself in his heart,
And he will destroy many while they are at ease.
He will even oppose the Prince of princes,
But he will be broken without human agency.
²⁶ “The vision of the evenings and mornings
Which has been told is true;
But keep the vision secret,
For it pertains to many days in the future.”**

There is no doubt, this was historically fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes – that's undeniable, but to varying degrees, this also accurately pictures the Antichrist who

is still yet to come at the end of times. As I summarize this passage, consider how both Antiochus and the Antichrist are described by Daniel.

- Both begin modestly – in obscurity, but increase in power and influence.
- Both are insolent – they are determined and defiant.
- Both are skilled in intrigue which literally means there is an *understanding of hidden things – the dark things*.
- Both are shrewd and very deceptive – stopping at nothing to further their wicked agenda.
- Both are powerful, but their power is not their own. That means there is an external power source – a power that is demonic – a power that is Satanic.
- Both will destroy to an extraordinary degree, and succeed in whatever they do.
- Both hate God’s people with a passion and persecute them with a vengeance.
- Both impose their own religion and their own culture.
- Both exalt themselves in arrogance and pride, and demand to be worshipped in mockery of the one true God.
- Both will be broken at the hands of God.

Based on this seemingly identical characterization of the historical Antiochus and the coming Antichrist, I think this passage is a dual prophecy about both. **So, what do we do with prophecy like this?** Well, look at the last verse – **verse 27**.

Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king’s business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.

Daniel is a good example for us. We may not understand everything when it comes to prophecy – it may be challenging and even troubling as it was to Daniel, but we got to get up and go about the King’s business. Prophecy is not given to make us smarter, or to entertain us, or to satisfy our curiosity – it’s given to change us and to compel us to do what we are supposed to do – the King’s business.

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