

DANIEL 8



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OMEGA

DANIEL 7 - 12

Daniel 8

In our previous study we were given understanding through Daniel's dream of the sovereignty of God over human kingdoms, depicted by the images of the four beasts. We were reminded through apocalyptic literature that the course of history is not random, but redemptive. God has a destination for his people to ultimately gather around the throne of his Son in everlasting blessing.

Daniel 8 places the microscope more closely on the successive rule of Kingdoms from the time of Daniel. His dream (7:1) that becomes a series of visions (7:18) is followed by a further vision (8:1), this time concerning a ram and a goat. The movement from the beasts of chapter 7 to the more recognisable animals of chapter 8 suggests we are focusing more deliberately on human rule.

The structure of the chapter is clear. Vv 1-14 contain the content of the vision. Vv 15-27 reveal its interpretation. We observe two statements about the vision and the end of each half of the chapter. Firstly, it is subject to *fulfilment* (v 13) indicating that there is a future unfolding of events to take place well beyond Daniel's time. Secondly (v 26), it is to be *sealed*, not because it is exclusive, but because it is a vision for a future time, when it will be revealed.

The chapter begins locating Daniel two years on from the first dream he experienced, now no longer located in Babylon, but in the realm of the Medes and the Persians (v 2). Kingdoms come and kingdoms go.

Vv 1-14 | The Content of the Vision

The Ram

The content of the vision is as follows. A ram with 2 horns charging west, north and south which no one could withstand and did as it pleased and became great (vv 1-4). A picture of a marauding and reckless power that seems unopposed in its might. Horns in these images symbolise power. That they are continually growing and changing throughout the chapter indicates the successive nature of human kings and kingdoms, each claiming greatness beyond the last.

The Goat

No sooner are we comprehending the pride of the ram, a goat with a horn comes from the west and attacks the ram shattering its horns, and the ram was powerless against it. The swiftness of the ram's defeat is underlined in the rapid movement of the goat whose feet appear not to touch the ground (v 5). At the height of the goat's power its large horn was broken off and four prominent horns replaced it toward the four winds of heaven (v 8). These kings and their reigns not only supplant each other, but express their arrogance to God in heaven.

The final Horn

Finally, a further horn grew out of one of the horns which grew in power to the south and east and the Beautiful Land (v 9). Reaching into the heavens it threw down some of the starry host and set itself to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord, removing the daily sacrifice and the sanctuary, prospering in all that it did, trampling on God's people as truth was thrown to the ground (v 12). This final power opposes both heaven and earth, boldly claiming superiority over all rule. For the second time in Daniel's reign, the temple is desecrated by one considers his greatness equal to that of the commander of the army of the Lord (v 11). Truth itself is sacrificed, as the ram assumes the place that only God has the right to occupy.

The Two Holy Ones

As if to provide some measure of perspective in this world of seemingly unbridled and unopposed human pride and power, two holy figures are captured in conversation with each other. The question raised concerns the fulfilment of the vision, indicating that there will be a limit on the rebellion that causes desolation (v 13). Very quickly we learn

that the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people will come to end and the temple will be reconsecrated (v 14). The rebellion that characterises human rule will make way for the restoration of the temple and release of God's people. Daniel was to see that the present and future times of suffering would last 2,300 days (evenings and mornings). While it is quite difficult to interpret the meaning of the number, it could be that it represents the seven year period during which Antiochus IV (the last horn of v 9) ruled and desecrated the temple. Whatever the case, the intent is to reinforce that human rule always has a limitation, even if in the midst of suffering God's people are tempted to despair for lack of hope.

Vv 15-27 | The Meaning of the Vision

One who looked like a man told Gabriel to tell Daniel the meaning of the vision (v 26). Daniel, prostrate, is called son and man and that the vision concerns the time of the end. Gabriel touches him and he is raised to his feet. Daniel is to hear what will happen later in the time of wrath (v 19).

One King after another: the spiral of successive rule

The two-horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. The four horns that replace the one represent four kingdoms that will emerge from Greece, but will not have the same power (vv 20-22). In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, represented by the final horn (v 9) will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. Causing devastation, he will succeed in whatever he does, destroying God's holy people. Deceit will prosper as he considers himself supreme over all rulers, on earth or in heaven. He will destroy many of the holy people and take his stand against the Prince of princes. In perhaps the most concise reference to heavenly authority in the chapter, we read that he will be destroyed, but not by human power (v 25).

Apocalyptic literature and the end times

While it has been popular to refer to the time of the end (v 19) as the return of the Lord's Messiah at the end of history, Daniel 8 is prophecy more specifically about 'what will happen later in the time of wrath.' This is how apocalyptic literature functions. It will speak firstly of the cycle of history that has been prevalent since Genesis 3. Human sin must be dealt with in judgment, but through that judgment God's grace secures salvation. This is displayed climactically in the work of the cross which rescues humanity from its spiral into self-destruction. Yet apocalyptic literature will also speak in a linear fashion, to show that history has a climax, which the New Testament describes as all things being summed up in Christ. Daniel 8 reveals these two sides of the one apocalyptic coin.

The text makes it clear that the two horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia (v 20). The goat is the king of Greece (v 21), from which four further Greek kingdoms emerge in succession. The final horn appears to be referring to the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes who in 167 BC conquered Jerusalem and desecrated the temple by dedicating it to his god. He waged a callous war against the Israelites of his day and very much fits the description of vv 23-25. Judas Maccabees put an end to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes in 166 BC, and is a figure in Jewish history revered as a great deliverer of God's people.

We can read about other Kings and Kingdoms that reflect the arrogance of human pride yet face humiliation in the light of the authority and power of the King of Heaven. Isaiah 14 speaks loud and clear about the bold and brash ambitions of Babylonian kingship, only to be destroyed and succeeded by the Kingdoms that followed. Ezekiel 28 reflects the same pattern. In the New Testament the 'man of lawlessness' (2 Thess 2:1-12) likewise mirrors the vision of Daniel 8.

What it means for Daniel and the readers of the prophecy

Daniel's vision is affirmed as true but is to be sealed up because it concerns the distant future (v 26). It will be revealed according to God's good timing. Daniel himself is exhausted by the vision, appalled by it because it seemed beyond understanding (v 27). He can see that the suffering of God's people for their faithfulness before him is far

from over, both in his generation and in those to come. The first readers of his prophecy (like us today) were reminded the walking faithfully in patience and endurance is required until the day of vindication. Even the seemingly most powerful of rulers will be brought to nought.

We are the blessed recipients of the revelation that Daniel struggled to comprehend, the seal having been opened as we recognise the fulfilment of the vision in Jesus' coming into the world and his final coming at the end of time. Ultimately the ram and the goat make way for the Lamb, the true deliverer who will provide an eternal rescue for his people.

We are like Daniel in so many ways, as those who still wait for the end, and are called to faithfully endure, knowing the plans and purposes of God cannot be thwarted. We read the apocalyptic pages of Revelation which reveal the cyclical pattern of salvation through judgment that has been the rhythm of human history from the bible's perspective.

Getting Started

1. Can you think of recent incidences you've experienced where 'a picture paints a thousand words'?
2. What do you think is the value of apocalyptic literature?

Into the text

Read Daniel 8

3. In God's grace we have both the content and the interpretation of Daniel's vision. Identify the meaning given to the following images:
 - a. the ram of v 3 with its two horns?
 - b. the goat of v 5 with the large horn?
 - c. the attack of the goat on the ram in v 7?
 - d. the large horn of the goat replaced by four horns in v 8?
 - e. the horn of v 9 that began small but grew in power?
4. How is the arrogance of the final horn expressed against the powers of heaven and the people of God?

Read Isaiah 14:1-15

5. In what ways does the king of Isaiah 14 reflect those described in Daniel 8?

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

6. In what ways does the man of lawlessness reflect those described in Daniel 8?

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

7. What is the outcome that apocalyptic literature points to?

Takeaway

8. How does this passage help you to have confidence even when it's difficult to comprehend the seeming arrogance and hubris of human rule?
9. What do you think you can do to help others to persevere in troubled times?