



Daniel

דניאל

Chapter 8

DANIEL'S VISION OF PERSIAN WARS

In AD330, Jaddua the high priest showed Alexander the Great Daniel chapter 8. Alexander was so impressed as he saw his military conquest of Persia laid out before him in a 200-year-old account that he not only spared the city but granted the Jews many concessions.

Daniel's eighth chapter is an account of how an angry Greek empire, not yet in existence when Daniel wrote his book, would attack and defeat the Persians. It also tells how the empire will break apart into four distinct pieces, then goes on to describe a ruler who will come out of that division to wreak havoc on the Jewish people.

DANIEL 8:1-2

In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar, a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that appeared to me earlier.

And it happened that, when I saw, I was in the palace at Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was beside the Ulai Canal.

- This vision was given to Daniel in the third year of the co-regency of Belshazzar, two years after the vision described in chapter 7.
- Scripture is not clear about whether Daniel was physically in the palace at Susa (also called Shusan) when he saw himself beside the canal, or if he saw himself projected both into the palace and near the canal. There are valid arguments for both points of view, though some Bibles take one or the other as their view. The NIV assumes the whole thing was seen in the vision, which isn't necessarily the case.
- The view that Daniel saw the entire thing as a vision is weaker than the view that he was physically there, because the passage puts him both inside the palace of Susa and beside the canal. How could he be inside and outside the palace at the same time? It makes more sense to assume that Daniel was in the palace and in the vision saw himself projected outside, beside the canal.
- The reason scholars doubt his presence there is that while Susa eventually became the capital of the Persian empire, at the time of Daniel's writing it was not a significant city. They see no reason why he would be there. However, on closer inspection there may be very good reasons. Just a few years earlier Nabonidus had granted Cyrus assistance for his conquest of the Medes. It is certainly possible that Daniel



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was on some kind of political mission for Nabonidus (not his son Belshazzar, as Daniel 5 makes it obvious they had never met). The last verse of this chapter says he went back about the king's business. Cyrus was likely headquartered in Susa. If Daniel was on a mission for Nabonidus, the whole scenario fits.

DANIEL 8:3-4

Then I lifted up my eyes and saw that there stood before the canal a ram with two horns on its head. The two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last.

I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beasts could stand against him, nor were any able to rescue from his power. He did according to his will, and became great.

- The ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The longer horn that grew up later was the Persian side. The Medes were originally the dominant force but Cyrus quickly turned things around so that the Persians rapidly overwhelmed the Medes and claimed the Empire through shrewd political maneuvering.
- Persia was long associated with the image of the ram. The king of Persia, when leading his army into battle, did not wear a crown but instead wore a ram's head with horns as his headpiece. The sign of the zodiac associated with Persia is Aries the Ram. While God does not deal in human metaphors, it is interesting that the image shown to Daniel representing the Persian empire was the image of a ram.

DANIEL 8:5-8

⁵ And as I was thinking about this, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground: and the goat had a prominent horn between his eyes.

⁶ And he came to the two-horned ram that I had seen standing before the canal, and charged at him in great fury and power.

⁷ And I saw him come close to the ram, and he was moved with rage against him, and battered the ram, shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless against him; the goat knocked him down to the ground and trampled him. Nobody could rescue the ram from his attack.



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⁸ The male goat became very great. And when he was mighty, the great horn was broken. In its place four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.

- Most goats have two horns on top of their heads. This one had a single horn between its eyes.
- It's not surprising that Daniel was shown the goat as moving so fast it didn't touch the ground. The goat, representing the Greek Empire (also known as the Macedonian Empire) under Alexander, moved so fast it literally flew eastward. Alexander conquered the known world in just 11 years.
- The Persian king Xerxes had built a huge army numbering 2 million men whom he had trained for four years. Yet Alexander's small army decimated the powerful Persian might with ferocity and innovative military tactics. The Persians were powerless to stand against the Greeks.
- Alexander died at the height of his power, of a sudden fever following a drunken party in Babylon at the age of 33. There were rumors that he was actually poisoned by Cassander, one of his generals. He was eventually succeeded by his four key generals who divided the kingdom among them after 22 years of infighting, murder, bribery and political chicanery.
- Daniel saw the rise of Persia while the dominant empire was still Babylon. He then saw the rise of the Greek empire which wouldn't take place for another 200 years.
- After Alexander's kingdom broke up, two dominant forces, those of Seleucus and Ptolemy, would fight each other for generations, and Daniel was given insight into that era as well (in much more detail in a later vision).
- Now Daniel is shown a future king who rises out of the remains of the Greek empire -- specifically out of the Seleucid portion of Syria just north of Palestine.

DANIEL 8:9

And out of one of them came up a little horn, which grew to great power, toward the south and the east and toward the beautiful land.

- Horns are biblical metaphors for kings or rulers because they often represent the power of animals.
- Out of the Seleucid empire would rise Antiochus IV Epiphanes ("the manifest one" or "the coming one"). Though he had no claim to the throne, he usurped the throne from his nephew by having his brother killed and his nephew kept as a hostage in Rome. He quickly moved south to invade Egypt in 170BC. Earlier he had expelled Onias III from his office as high priest, installing Onias' brother Jason as the result of a bribe. Onias was murdered in the fall of 171.



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- Antiochus succeeded in eastern invasions into Parthia and Armenia. Offered a larger bribe by Jason's brother Menelaus, he deposed Jason and installed Menelaus as high priest, but Jason laid siege to Jerusalem while Antiochus was fighting Ptolemy VII in Egypt. Antiochus reinstalled Menelaus.
- In December 168BC, Antiochus was turned back from Alexandria by Roman commander Popilius Laenas in a humiliating incident. Outraged, he began to attack the Jews, militarily a weaker group that he could dominate.
- Antiochus IV had a swine sacrificed on the altar. He cancelled the morning and evening sacrifice and made it illegal to read the Scriptures.

DANIEL 8:10

And it became great, reaching to the host of heaven; and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.

- This reference to "starry host" should not be interpreted as heavenly beings. It simply means the Israelites. There are biblical references to the starry host as the Israelites, who are to become as the stars in number (Genesis 15:5). In Exodus 12:41 they are referred to as "the hosts of Yahweh."
- Antiochus IV saw himself as divine, though he wanted to make the worship of Zeus the official state religion of the Jews. Surprisingly, his Hellenistic efforts were actually supported by some Jews, though most were deeply offended.
- After he was turned away from Alexandria by the Romans, Antiochus IV sent his general Apollonius with 20,000 troops to Jerusalem, supposedly on a peace mission. But when they arrived on a Sabbath day, they mercilessly slaughtered thousands of men, women and children. From there, things went from bad to worse.

DANIEL 8:11-12

He set himself up to be above even the Prince of the host, took away the daily sacrifice, and cast down the place of the holy sanctuary.

And the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to him because of rebellion, and truth was thrown to the ground. And it succeeded in its efforts and prospered.



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- Antiochus had a swine sacrificed on the altar of the Jewish temple, desecrating the sanctuary by bringing it low to human relevance. He cancelled the daily morning and evening sacrifice and made it illegal to read the Scriptures, upon penalty of death (truth thrown to the ground).
- He then set up an idol of Zeus in the Holy of Holies on December 25, 167BC, an event called “the abomination that causes desolation” because it represents the worst form of idolatry possible.
- Judas Maccabeas and his brothers sprung into action, eventually overthrowing him and rededicated the temple exactly three years later on December 25, 164BC, an event commemorated to this day in the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah.

DANIEL 8:13-14

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, “How long will it be for the vision to be completed concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and for both the sanctuary and the saints to be trampled under foot?”

And he said to me, “It will be 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be cleansed.”

- There are major disagreements over this passage. Some have tried to interpret the 2,300 days as “years” assuming it was some kind of coded reference and gotten themselves into big trouble by pinpointing dates in the 19th century as the year Christ would return. Others say that it refers to “days” while still others say it means “evening mornings” (2 per day), which would come out as about three years and two months. With so many views, can we make any conclusions?

2,300 WHAT?

- Under no circumstances can this mean “years.” It means either days or sacrifices. If it means days then the period from the “abomination that causes desolation” (setting an idol in the Holy of Holies) to the cleansing of the temple would add up to nearly 6-1/2 years. Onias III, the rightful priest, was murdered about that length of time before the cleansing of the temple took place (I haven’t been able to find an exact date to confirm). This appears to be the view that has the closest link to an actual event of significance.



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- The term “evening mornings” can refer to individual sacrifices (there was one every morning and one every evening). Given that perspective, it would represent about 3 years and 55 days. However, according to the best information available, that time period doesn’t match up to anything meaningful if you work backwards from the rededication of the temple under the Maccabees December 25, 164BC.

A FORESHADOWING?

- Naturally, this reference may relate exclusively to the second occasion that these events will take place. Jesus made it clear that the events under Antiochus IV were only a foreshadowing and that Daniel was really referring to a future event that had not yet happened when Jesus walked in Jerusalem. Still, while foreshadowing is a common situation in Scripture, the view that this reference to 2,300 days or sacrifices is only intended for the final version of these events is not generally accepted.
- There are many examples in Scripture where a promised event was “foreshadowed” or presented in a form very similar to the prophecy but years ahead of time. The effect is like a spiritual “dry run” or rehearsal of the actual event that was prophesied so that we know what to expect. It brings prophecy closer. The coming world leader will behave very similar to how Antiochus behaved, so that we would know how to recognize the actions and impact of the anti-Christ when he does appear.

DANIEL 8:15-17

And it came to pass, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision, and tried to understand it, there stood before me one with the appearance of a man.

And I heard a man’s voice between the banks of the Ulai calling, “Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.”

So he came near where I was standing. When he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face. But he said to me, “Understand, son of man, that the vision deals with the time of the end.”

- This is the first place we see Gabriel’s name in the Bible. Only three angels are revealed by name: Gabriel, Michael and Lucifer. Every time Gabriel is mentioned, he is shown as a Messianic messenger.
- Later, in chapter 9, Daniel immediately recognizes Gabriel when he sees him. This shows that angels have distinct physical characteristics just like people.
- Another heavenly being who isn’t identified gives Gabriel the authority to tell Daniel the vision.



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DANIEL 8:18-22

¹⁸ As he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground, but he touched me, and brought me to my feet.

¹⁹ He said, “I will explain what will happen at the end of the time of wrath, for the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.

²⁰ The two-horned ram you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.

²¹ And the shaggy goat is the king of Greece. And the large horn between his eyes is the first king.

²² After that is broken, the four others which come up in its place are four kingdoms that will rise up out of his nation, but not with his level of power.

- It's interesting that he refers to this as representing the time of the end, because it was clearly fulfilled in Antiochus IV. However, we know that Antiochus was only a foreshadowing, because Jesus himself said so! He identified the “abomination that causes desolation” (an idol placed in the Holy of Holies) as an event that is yet to come.

DANIEL 8:23-25

In the later time of their kingdom, when rebels are fully wicked, a king of fierce countenance, and skilled at intrigue, will arise.

He will become mighty, but not by his own power. He will cause incredible destruction, and will prosper, and will accomplish things, and will destroy the mighty and the holy people.

Through his strategies he will cause deceit to prosper. He will magnify himself in his heart, and through assurances of peace will destroy many and will stand up against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be broken, but not by human power.

- Daniel is now given a specific message about the coming world leader, the one we often refer to as the Antichrist. He will be stern-faced yet smooth, charming and politically clever. He will not be revealed until after the “hinderer” is removed (generally thought to be a reference to the Holy Spirit). Although he won't be revealed until the last seven years before Armageddon, he may already be alive today.



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- Even this passage applies well to Antiochus IV. He died shortly after hearing of the Maccabean victory over Jerusalem, with sudden severe abdominal pains accompanied by a report that he was being consumed by worms. According to one account he was calling out to the God of the Hebrews to spare his life. According to one account he was calling out to the God of the Hebrews to spare his life.

DANIEL 8:26

The vision of the evenings and mornings which was told is true, but seal up the vision, for it will not take place until much time has passed.

- Daniel was told to seal up details of the vision because it was not meant to be known at that time. Perhaps some time in the future a newly discovered writing of Daniel will appear on the scene.
- There is some disagreement over what is meant by “sealing up” the vision. Most scholars believe it means that some parts of his vision are hidden and will be revealed at the proper time. Others simply means to close the book by writing down what he saw. Others say it probably refers to people being unable to fully understand it until much later in history, pointing to the fact that understanding of Scripture is increasing.
- There is Scriptural precedence for assuming that additional documents by Daniel are sealed and will be released over time. When the “magi” came from the East into Bethlehem seeking the “one who was born King of the Jews” they must have been working from some kind of prophetic documentation. What were they using as their reference? Some scholars believe that as head of the wise men Daniel left more than one prophecy “sealed up” until the right time.

DANIEL 8:27

I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for several days. Afterwards I got up and went about the king’s business. I was astonished by the vision, but could not understand it.

- Daniel went about the king’s business. Yet we know from Chapter 5 that he had never met Belshazzar. As a result, we have to assume that he was working directly for Nabonidus, not Belshazzar. This suggests that he may well have been physically in the city of Susa on a diplomatic mission.