

A Study in Daniel 8:8–27

The He-Goat, the Little Horn, and the Time of the End

We take up at verse 8 tonight to get the context. Book of Daniel chapter 8, beginning at verse 8.

"The he-goat became exceeding great, but when he was become strong the great horn was broken, and in its stead came up four notable ones toward the four winds of the heavens. And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which became exceeding great toward the south and toward the east and toward the beauty of the earth."

"And it became great even to the host of heaven, and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground and trampled upon them. And he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and from him the continual sacrifice was taken away and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And a time of trial was appointed unto the continual sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground, and it practiced and prospered."

"And I heard one saint speaking, and another said unto that one who spoke, How long shall be the vision of the continual sacrifice and of the transgression that maketh desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden down underfoot? And he said unto me, Until 2,300 evenings and mornings, then shall the sanctuary be vindicated."

"And it came to pass when I had seen the vision, I sought for the understanding of it. And behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man, and I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and he called and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision."

"And he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face. And he said unto me, Understand, son of man, for the vision is for the time of the end. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep stupor with my face toward the ground, and he touched me and set me upright where I had stood."

"And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be at the end of the indignation, for at the set time the end shall be. The ram that thou sawest having the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn that was between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up in its stead, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with

his power."

"And at the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors shall have come to the full, a king of bold countenance and understanding riddles shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power. And he shall destroy marvelously, and shall prosper and shall practice, and shall destroy the mighty ones and the people of the saints. And through his cunning shall he cause craft to prosper in his hand, and he will magnify himself in his heart, and by prosperity will corrupt many. And he will stand up against the Prince of princes, but he shall be broken without hand."

"And the vision of the evening and the morning which have been told is true. But close thou up the vision, for it is many days to come. And I Daniel fainted and was sick certain days. Then I rose up and did the king's business, and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it."

Why Are These Things Revealed? The Purpose of Prophecy

We might reasonably ask: why does the Lord tell us these things? The symbols in this chapter are not immediately self-explanatory. A ram with two horns, a swift goat, a little horn — why not simply say what is meant? The Lord does not talk in riddles when He wants us to do something straightforward. Yet much of Scripture is not just flatly laid out for us, and this applies not only to prophecy.

The Apostle Paul raises the question of the law about not muzzling the ox that treads out the grain. Was God altogether occupied with the oxen? No — there is moral significance in these things, and the Lord expects us to look at them and enter into that significance. The whole of Scripture is constructed this way in many places. That is why we have the Bible — the Lord intends for us to enter into it. There are parts of the Bible we can be tempted to pass over because they are difficult, but the Lord does not give us a pass on those.

Specifically with respect to Daniel's visions, there is a more particular answer: the Lord wanted Daniel to know His purposes, so that Daniel could act appropriately as things came to pass. Daniel was chosen for these revelations not because he needed correcting, but because he was especially walking with the Lord. He was in captivity — a prisoner for most of his adult life — but he was in the Lord's will. He discharged the responsibilities placed upon him. At the end of our chapter, after fainting and being sick for several days, he rose up and did the king's business. He was a faithful man.

The same principle applies to us: we need to understand the Lord's purposes before we can pray intelligently or act appropriately. If we do not understand what the Lord is doing, we act according to our own notions, and that is not obedience.

Horns and Beasts: A Note on Symbols

Before reading through the vision, it is worth establishing from Scripture itself what these symbols mean, so we are not guessing.

Daniel 7:17 tells us directly: "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings that shall arise out of the earth." So beasts represent kingdoms. And Daniel 7:24 says: "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall arise ten kings." So horns represent kings — the individual rulers who occupy the position of authority within a beast-kingdom. This is not a system worked out by interpreters; the Scripture tells us this directly.

With that in hand, the little horn is not a specific individual person so much as it is the authority — the kingship — over that portion of the beast. It is the position of rule, personified in whoever occupies it.

The He-Goat and the Ram: Greece and Medo-Persia

The ram with two horns is identified plainly in verse 20: the kings of Media and Persia. The higher horn arose later and became the stronger, answering to the fact that the Persians ultimately prevailed within that partnership and Cyrus the Persian came to lead the united empire.

The rough goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn between his eyes is the first king — Alexander the Great. In perhaps ten years, Alexander conquered an extraordinary portion of the known world, even reaching as far east as India before his men refused to go further. He died young, around the age of thirty-two, and what happened next answers precisely to this vision: four of his generals divided his territory and established four kingdoms in its place. That is the four notable horns that came up in place of the one that was broken.

This prophecy was given approximately 150 years before Alexander was born. The precision with which Daniel's vision describes Alexander's career — the speed of his conquest, his sudden death at the height of his power, the fourfold division that followed — is so exact that some have argued the book must have been written after the fact. But the accuracy of fulfilled prophecy is its own evidence of divine origin.

The four winds of heaven toward which the four kingdoms spread corresponds historically to the division of Alexander's empire into four regions: north (Syria and the Seleucid kingdom), south (Egypt under the Ptolemies), east, and west. And Scripture always takes its bearings from Palestine — when it says south and east, it means south and east of the land that God calls the beauty of the earth.

The Little Horn: Historical Fulfillment and Future Application

Out of one of the four kingdoms arose a little horn that became exceeding great toward the south, the east, and toward the beauty of the earth. This has both a historical and a future application, and it is important to hold both together without collapsing one into the other.

Historically, this was fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes — a king of the Seleucid north who invaded the land of Israel, desecrated the temple, and caused the continual sacrifice to cease. He is recorded to have sacrificed a pig on the altar — an act that exactly answers to verse 11. The Maccabees subsequently reclaimed and re-sanctified the temple. These events are well attested historically. The parentheses placed around verses 11 and 12 in some translations are meant to indicate that these verses have a more personal and specifically historical reference to that man.

But verse 17 says the vision is for the time of the end, and verse 19 says it concerns what shall be at the end of the indignation. These expressions indicate that while the historical fulfillment was real, it was also a foreshadowing of something yet to come. A future king of the north will similarly arise during the time of the Tribulation and oppress the people of Israel. The historical Antiochus was a type of that future one. Some of what Daniel says here was fulfilled once in history and will not be repeated in exactly the same form; other elements are shadows of a coming reality that will be far worse.

The Trial Is Appointed — God Is in Control

A small but vital phrase in verse 12: a time of trial was appointed. Who appointed it? Not the wicked general, not some accident of history. The Lord appointed it — its nature, its severity, and its duration. Even when times of trial come upon God's people, whether in Daniel's day or in our own, they do not come out of nowhere. The Lord has appointed them. He is in control of those things, and He determines how long they will last.

This is a comfort and a caution. A comfort because it means our trials are not random. A caution because it means we should not simply ask for deliverance from trouble if the Lord has appointed that trouble for a purpose — as Jeremiah was told not to pray for Israel's deliverance because the Lord would not hear such a prayer at that time, for they had not repented. We need to understand the Lord's ways before we know how to pray.

The Transgression and What It Means

Why did the Lord allow the sanctuary to be trodden down and the sacrifice to cease? Verse 12 tells us it was by reason of transgression. The desolation was a judgment — not merely the cruelty of a foreign king imposed on an innocent people. Israel was already in idolatry. The abomination of a pagan king coming in and desecrating the temple was not something that happened to a faithful people from

without; it was allowed because they had already brought the abomination in from within.

There is a profound parallel here with what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24:15 — "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, let him that readeth understand." And Isaiah 28:15 describes Israel making a covenant with death and with Sheol, saying: when the overwhelming scourge passes over, it will not come to us — only to be told in verse 18 that their covenant with death shall be annulled. Their trust is misplaced; the desolation will come upon them because of what is already in their hearts. The external oppressor only brings into the open what was already present internally.

The Sacrifice Taken from the Prince of the Host

There is a detail in verse 11 that is easily missed but is morally significant: the continual sacrifice was taken away from him — that is, from the Prince of the host, who is Christ. The sacrifice was not merely the possession of the people who performed it. It was offered to the Lord. When the wicked king came and abolished it, he was taking something from God. He was robbing the Lord of what was due to Him.

This is an insight that Daniel himself had — that beyond the suffering of the people, something had been done to the Lord. Our tendency is to think about how events affect us. Daniel was able to enter into the Lord's thoughts on these things, to see how they affected Him. It was not just Israel that was being oppressed; it was God who was being dishonored.

Gabriel, the Son of Man, and the Reward of Seeking

When Gabriel comes to explain the vision, he addresses Daniel as son of man — the same title given to Ezekiel, and the title by which the Lord most often referred to Himself during His earthly ministry. It is the title of rejection. Daniel, one of the faithful remnant in captivity in Babylon, is identified through this title with the Lord in His own place of rejection. It is a remarkable little detail.

Gabriel says the vision is for the time of the end. This is how we can say with confidence that these prophecies are not merely historical — they bear on things yet to come. All of these things have to do with Daniel's people, Israel — God's earthly people. For those of us who know the Lord as our Savior, these events will unfold on the earth during the Tribulation while we are with Him in heaven, having been called home before that time began.

Verse 15 records that Daniel did not simply move on after the vision: he sought for the understanding of it. And he received far more in the explanation than he had been given in the vision itself. This is often the way: when someone sought an explanation of something the Lord had revealed — whether through prophecy or parable — more was given in the explanation than in the original utterance. The

lesson for us is the same. We should not pass over what we do not understand and go back to sleep. We should look to the Lord, ask Him, and He will show us things we did not know we did not know.

As the Lord said in Matthew 7: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. That is a promise.

Lord willing, we will take up verses 23 onward next time.