

Daniel 8:1-14 – The Vision of Evenings and Mornings (Part 1)

At the end of chapter 7, Daniel describes the effect his first vision had on him with words that suggest he might have been in shock, full of dread and fear for his people, the Jews, and worried about the future. Two years later he had another vision that leaves him sick for days, overwhelmed and devastated: chapter 8. This was hard for Daniel to see. Daniel loved the home he had been taken from — Jerusalem. The jewel of ancient Israel. Home of the Temple of Yahweh. It was destroyed by the armies of Babylon a few years after Daniel and his friends were taken captive. The fate of the people, the Jews, was tied to the fate of the city throughout the writings of the prophets. So to long for Jerusalem's restoration was to hope for better days for the Jews. Jerusalem was the symbol of God's promises to Israel, the sign of God's salvation. A little like how Christians now feel about the Cross. In chapter 8, Daniel resumes writing in Hebrew, after the Aramaic section from chapter 2 through 7. Writing in the language of the Jews he is telling his readers this is about the Jews, it's about Jerusalem. The prophecies so far in Daniel, the Statue of 4 Gentile Empires, and the Four Beasts, those were mainly about the rest of the nations rebelling against the Kingdom of God. But what about Israel?

I've heard some atheists argue that God can't be real since there is so much evil and suffering in the world. But the truth is the other way around: the reason we care about evil and human suffering is because we are created in God's image and questions about life and death, good and evil matter. And the Bible is rich with hope and promise that suffering matters to God, but so does evil. So does sin. And in spite of all that we humans have done to ruin the good world God created, the Bible promises God will restore what sin has ruined. We have a reminder of that promise in this prophecy in Daniel 8.

The long-range forecast calls for desolation (verses 1-11)

The Persian Ram (vv 1-4)

I've said it before that ever since Jeremiah had sent a messenger to preach in the streets of Babylon, the city where Daniel lived most of his life, the Jewish exiles had looked forward to the day Jeremiah prophesied about when the King of Persia would come and kick Babylon's butt. When Daniel had this vision he was in Babylon, the year was 550BC, but he saw himself standing in the city of Susa, capitol of one of Babylon's provinces, Elam. And he sees another beast—not one of the four from the vision two years before—but a ram with two tall horns. Later in this vision when an angel tells Daniel what this means (v20) he is told that this Ram with its two tall horns is the Kingdom of Medo-Persia: this helps us make sense of these verses [**read** vv1-4]. The two horns here aren't just "kings" but kingdoms—the kingdom of Media which had also ruled over Persia at first; and the kingdom of Persia which that same year—550BC—took control and now ruled over the Medes. The Persian king who did that was Cyrus the Great. (This also confirms how to read the symbols in Daniel 7:5 where the Persian "Bear" is raised up on one side; lopsided like the two horns, one bigger than the other.) But for Daniel who worked for the government of Babylon in 550, a few details really stood out: a) the Ram was on the bank of the Ulai Canal (v3), which meant it was about to take the city of Susa on the other side of the river. b) The province of Elam, on the border between Babylonia and Medo-Persia, was about to fall to the Persians. c) The Ram was looking west toward Babylon and was getting ready to charge [**read** v4]. This all happened 10 years later when Cyrus the Great conquered Susa, made it his capitol, then charged west and took Babylon. Verse 4 says the Ram charged first west, then north, then south. After Babylon, Cyrus did conquer north, consolidating Persian control over everything from Lydia in the Northwest to India in

the Northeast; then the Ram charged south under Cyrus' son, Cambyses II, and conquered Egypt in 525BC. So this prophecy predicted the shape of how the Persian empire expanded.ⁱ An ancient Greek historian even describes Cyru's plan that way—west, north, south, but Cyrus was killed conquering the region north of Afghanistan and his son became king. But verse 4 describes the total dominance of the Persian Empire and all its kings over their enemies—nobody could stop them, they bowed to nobody (v4). They established the largest empire the world had ever seen.

The Persian Empire, the backdrop to Bible books like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, was a welcome change for Israel. Many Jews were allowed to return home, Jerusalem was rebuilt along with the temple. But the warnings of Moses in Deut 28:66 still warned of worse times ahead if the people did not turn from their sins: "Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, 'If only it were evening!' and at evening you shall say, 'If only it were morning!' because of the dread that your heart shall feel..." (Deut. 28:66-67)

The Greek Goat (vv5-8)

So Daniel sees a male goat attack the ram [read v5]. The interpretation given in verse 21 names this goat as the Kingdom of Greece—the Greek Empire—and the large horn as the "first king". So verse 5 is pretty clearly showing how Alexander the Great became the King of Greece and seemed to almost fly across the earth as his empire expanded and ate up everything that had belonged to the Persians. He came directly against the Medo-Persian Empire, and conquered Susa itself in 331BC.ⁱⁱ [read v7] Alexander's route of conquests was more or less a chase after the Persian King Darius III who kept running away, first from battles in Syria, then in Babylonia, then in Media, then in the Persian heartland of Parthia, where Darius was killed—ending the dynasty begun with Cyrus--and then stamping out what was left of Persian rule in the far northern provinces of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alexander's greatness reached its limit in 326 in northern India at the river Hyphasis (the Beas River today).^{iv} [read v8] He returned then to Susa where he consolidated his control over his new empire. Then returning to Babylon, he died suddenly on June 10 or 11 in 323 BC, either by poison or by some kind of fever (even West Nile Virus has been suggested)^v. The empire was divided, in a famous note of history, into four parts after the Battle of Ipsus in 301BC, into kingdoms founded by Ptolemy in Egypt; by Cassander in Greece; by Lysimachus in Thrace; by Seleucus in the rest of the empire—Alexander's empire was divided up into these 4 horns which eventually each fell to Rome. Seleucus acquired Thrace in 281BC; Rome conquered the Greek heartland in 168BC; Pompey took Syria for Rome in 64BC; Caesar Augustus conquered Egypt in 30BC. So Daniel's vision brings us just 25 odd years short of Luke 2:1, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered..." which forced Joseph to take Mary to register in Bethlehem. A time when the Jewish people were weary of being trampled down by one foreign power after another, longing for the day when Jerusalem would be free again. But what about Jerusalem?

The vision of the four beasts in chapter 7 tells about the rise and fall of the Roman Empire from that time forward until the end, when Jesus will come again. It told about how a little horn from Rome would wage war against "the saints"—a mysterious "holy people" that Daniel saw would one day inherit the Kingdom of God and rule over all the Earth. But what about the Jews? What about Jerusalem? Hadn't God promised Solomon that David's Kingdom would rise again in Jerusalem? In Matthew 23, Jesus wept over Jerusalem—God in the flesh lamented, "'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen

gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt. 23:37-39 ESV)

The off-shoot Horn (vv9-11)

This next portion in Daniel's vision is very hard to explain—and I'll leave most of the interpretation of it until the next sermon on the end of this chapter. But what is clear is that it deals with Daniel's people, the Jews, and the city of Jerusalem. And the predictions about both can be boiled down into one word—the same word Jesus used: "desolation". [read v9] This "little horn" is according to the interpretation in verse 23, a "king" or more likely a "kingdom" like all the other horns in Daniel's visions. Verse 9 says this kingdom will grow "exceedingly great" from Daniel's point of view in Susa, first south, then east, then toward "the glorious land"—where Daniel's beloved Jerusalem had once stood. [read v10] Of the other 15 times this phrase, "host of heaven" appears in the Hebrew Bible, at least 12 of them are about the pagan worship of the Sun, Moon, and constellations (c.f. 2 Kings 23:5). If verse 9 shows the geographical growth of this kingdom, it looks like this verse describes this kingdom growing spiritually powerful. Its victims will include a) "some of" the people who serve the Kingdom of God, b) the truth itself. [read v11] If verse 9 is geography, and verse 10 is spiritual, then verse 11 is blasphemous growth: a) it will rise against the *Commander* of the Army of God's Kingdom—verse 25 interprets that *Commander/Prince* to be "the Prince of Princes"—b) it will take away the regular worship that belongs to the Prince of Princes;^{vi} c) it will overthrow the place of the sanctuary. So Daniel's vision implies that by this time the Messiah will have come—the Prince of Princes—that God's Kingdom will already have begun in some way, that "some" of the people of God's Kingdom will suffer at the hands of this off-shoot Kingdom, and that Jerusalem itself, "the place of the sanctuary"—not the temple, but the "place of the sanctuary" or "foundation of the holy place" will be overthrown. The heir to David's Kingdom will have already come, but some of His people will be prevented from worshipping Him, will be trampled down, and Jerusalem occupied.

The desolations are called-for because of sin (v12-13)

Some translations read verses 12-13 a little differently, but I follow the ESV here for the many reasons Keil and Delitzsch list in their commentary.^{vii} Verse 12 functions then like a brief summary of the whole career of this little horn and what he gets away with...and why. If you and I loved Jerusalem like Daniel, and cared for the Jews like he did, we would want to know, "Why O Lord? How could God let this happen?" And the answer in verse 12 is, "because of transgression". [read v12] When you see this prophecy, and verse 12 in particular, in light of what was currently going on for the whole Jewish nation, it brings to mind the warning to King Solomon in 2 Chron. 7:19-22 [read]. God had sent prophet after prophet to warn Israel that this would happen. Ever since God first warned Israel through Moses in Lev 26 and Deut 28. Verse 12 says that the "host"—that is the people of Israel (again I agree with the exegetical reasons given by K&D^{viii}), and everything that was part of worshipping God, and "gave these over" to the awful little horn. "Gave over" is the same word as in Dan 1:2 when God back then "gave over" the Kingdom of Judah itself into the hands of Babylon. God does this as discipline for Israel's sins that had piled up since Israel first entered the Promised Land 858 years before Daniel's vision. And then Daniel's vision is interrupted by the sound of someone speaking—someone even angels defer to—and he hears an angel ask the next question: "How long?"

2 Thess 1:5-7 teaches us to count it as an honour to suffer at the hands of God's enemies when it is for the sake of God's Kingdom; and it teaches us to hold on for the relief that is coming when Jesus returns. What a light God's Word gives us in times of darkness! To know that there is a real reason for when the world goes so terribly wrong; to know there is a day coming when a new dawn will bring righteousness and peace to the Earth! And the whole weight of Bible prophecy attaches the hope of that day to the second coming of Jesus Christ. He is our hope. And He is the Prince, the Commander of the Host, the divine speaker who answers the angels question in the next verse.

[A glorious dawn is still to come \(v14\)](#)

I used the word, "us" in this heading because it's important to realize this prophecy is about the transgression of the Jews and the predicted restoration of Jerusalem, but it is also intended to apply to all of God's people, Jewish or not. What He did in making Israel into a nation, teaching them His ways, warning them to not stray away, and then after a long, long time, bringing about the judgement He warned of—well, it's like a sign to the whole world! He is the Creator, we owe Him our worship and obedience, and yet that's not what we give Him. The death that, as Paul said in Rom 5:14, has ruled humanity's fate ever since Adam is a warning to trust God before it's too late. There is a specific reason for the specific desolations of the Jewish people; and there is a general reason for the general suffering of the human race—"transgression", i.e., "sin". But there is a day coming when God will fix what we have broken—and as a sign of hope to really believe that, there is a day coming, according to Daniel's prophecy here, when even before the return of Jesus, God will restore Jerusalem and the Jewish people from all the desolations that He brought on them. Christ is the One who answers the angels question: and He said the restoration of "holiness" (not actually "sanctuary" here or even "holy place") will happen "after 2300 evenings and mornings".

As I'll show next week when we get talking about the angel's interpretation of this prophecy, this odd period of time hints at a wonderful truth that becomes clear in the New Testament—that even though Israel deserved God's judgement; even though we do too; God will shorten the time of Israel's desolation; He will soften His heart and show mercy. And that too is a sign for the whole world. But the sign is Good News to you and me only if we actually listen, pay attention, and ask God to forgive our transgressions, give us grace, and restore what our sin has broken.

ⁱ According to Herodotus, this was more or less the plan Cyrus had after conquering Lydia:

"According to the Greek researcher Herodotus of Halicarnassus, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, Cyrus the Great, conquered Lydia and continued 'with his mind on Babylon and the Bactrians and the Sacae and the Egyptians.'" From <<http://www.livius.org/articles/place/bactria/>>

The Sacae are the Scythians, and the ones specially noted to have been subdued by Cyrus were those living in Uzbekistan, the Sakâ haumavargâ, [<http://www.livius.org/articles/people/scythians-sacae/>].

The graphic on Wikipedia, "Persian Empire timeline including important events and territorial evolution" shows the expansion after 550BC in the same general shape as listed in Daniel 8:4

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire#/media/File:Achaemenid_Empire.gif].

ⁱⁱ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susa#Macedonian.2C_Parthian_and_Sassanid_periods]

ⁱⁱⁱ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great#Fall_of_the_Empire_and_the_East]

^{iv} [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beas_River]

^v [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great#Death_and_succession]

^{vi} Keil and Delitzch (see below) are right that it is ridiculous to say this title refers to the High Priest at the time of the Maccabees, in light of the explanation in verse 25. [K&D, "Dan 8:11].

^{vii} Keil and Delitzch, *Old Testament Commentary* (Online Bible edition), "Dan 8:12-13".

viii **Ibid.**