

Daniel 8:15-27 – The Vision of Evenings and Mornings (Part 2)

Daniel sought to understand the vision (Vv 15-19)

I'd like you to notice what Daniel writes in verse 15—“when I... had seen the vision, I sought to understand it...” (So if you just heard these verses about Rams and Goats and horns and horns growing out of horns, and you're lost, but you want to understand it, then you've got something in common with the Prophet Daniel!) But let me suggest that this text is about two realities that are more important than any of the details: 1) sin leads to desolation, 2) Christ Jesus stands ready to make everything right again. I want to take a few minutes to show you why I see that in these verses. The first reason is because of what Daniel had just seen in this vision—it is summed up by an angel's question in verse 13: **[read]** Just to get our terms straight before we go on, in the ESV it talks about “the regular burnt offering”, but it's just one word in Hebrew that means, “the continual”, and I agree with the scholars Keil and Delitzsch who conclude that this word is about way more than the “burnt offering” it's about everything that God commanded to be part of the regular worship of His people—it's about true worship.¹ Second, in verse 13 you see the phrase, “the transgression that makes desolate”? That's not a prophecy catch phrase for some super villain, that's simply another way of saying what was already said in verse 12, that the people and true worship will be lost “because of transgression”—the transgression is the cause behind the desolation that the angel asks about in verse 13. And that's the first reality we need to see is one of the two main themes in this whole “vision of the evenings and mornings”: sin leads to desolation. The second reality is as full of hope and promise as the first one is of warning: **[read v15]**. One in “the appearance of a man” commands the angel Gabriel...**[read vv16]** The Most Important Person--The Son of God in the appearance of a man--sends a mere angel, Gabriel, to help Daniel. So this Person, then, who commands angels, is whom verse 11 named, “the Commander/Prince of the Host”, and verse 25 names, “the Prince of princes”. It was Christ Himself whom Daniel saw standing at the Ulai Canal... The Son of God was not inactive before He was born as Jesus of Nazareth in Bethlehem. Daniel hears His voice from the banks of the Ulai Canal in Susa. If the Ram standing on the bank of the canal meant Persia was getting ready to invade Susa, Christ standing there, speaking from there, means God had already invaded Susa, God already ruled over Babylon, Christ was already King of kings. But more than just teaching us that Christ is sovereign, it calls us to trust in the promise Christ holds out to anyone who believes. The promise He made in verse 14 **[read]**. One day, Jesus Christ will make right what sin has ruined. If you get nothing else out of Daniel 8, make sure you don't miss that. Sin desolates, but Jesus delivers and redeems.

[read vv17-18] I said that Jesus will make everything right “one day”—and that's what the angel makes sure Daniel hears: the worst desolations and the best redemption is “for the time of the end” (v17). And either the weight of this knowledge, or the frightening holiness of the angel who comes to him from the presence of God, or both, make Daniel pass out. So the angel Christ sent, the angel Gabriel, touches Daniel and strengthens him to be able to hear and understand so he can use this to strengthen and help the Jewish people and everyone who reads this. **[read v19]**. It's not about Daniel's lifetime, or even the generation after that: it's about the events in “the latter end of the indignation”, “the appointed time of the end”. The indignation here is God's indignation (the same word is parallel to the wrath of God in Jeremiah 10:10), the anger of God that this prophecy says would eventually fall upon the Jewish people. God's indignation would not last forever: *In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,*” says the LORD, your Redeemer. (Isa. 54:8 ESV)

2300 “Evenings” and “Mornings”

This prediction in verse 14, the prediction of a future day when Christ will restore what sin has desolated, Christ Himself says will happen after 2300 evenings and mornings. The hope of restoration, of relief, of redemption, comes after a long time of desolation. [read v14] The “evenings” and “mornings” bring to mind the warnings of Moses that also predicted Israel’s desolation because of transgression (in Lev 26 and Deut 28). Moses warned that one day God would destroy the cities of Israel and scatter the Jews among the nations of the Earth (c. f. Lev 26:31-33; Deut 28:64-65). And he predicted the evenings and mornings the Jews would hope would bring relief, would just bring dread:

“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 ESV)

Verse 14 then is really key to the vision in Daniel 8; Gabriel himself describes this whole vision not as “the vision of the little horn”, but as “the vision of evenings and mornings” in verse 26. So don’t make the mistake of thinking the most interesting thing in this vision is about the Antichrist, or some evil tyrant, but take Gabriel’s word for it that this vision is about how Jesus Christ is Lord of the nations, and when our days and nights fill our souls with dread, look to Christ and hope in Him. Almost 600 years after this vision, Jesus grieved that His people had not put their hope in Him, and had not prayed to Him for help when they languished under occupation by the armies of Persia, then of Greece, and then of Rome: [read Matt 23:37-38].

Where is Christ when we need Him?

The “Vision of the Evenings and Mornings of Dread” does not just start with a vision of Christ; it’s supposed to teach us to find Christ at the beginning of the vision, in the middle, and of course at the end. He didn’t just stand at the Ulai Canal in Susa in 550BC, the year Daniel had this vision, and the same year Cyrus the Great established the Medo-Persian Empire; everything that Daniel sees in this vision is by the sovereign decree of the divine Prince of Princes. [read vv20-22] Where was Christ when the Persians ruled over Israel and the Jews were threatened with genocide? He was there; He was in control; He was as close as a prayer. Where was Christ when the Greeks rose to power; when the empire split up into Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt? He was there, as close as a prayer. Where was Christ when the Syrian king, Antiochus IV slaughtered thousands and polluted the holy Temple? He was there, as close as a prayer. Where was Christ when Pompey conquered Jerusalem for Rome and profaned the holy Temple? Or when Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple which has never been built again? Christ was there, grieving that His people had not come to Him and taken shelter under His wings. But Christ had come, and He had travelled the highways and byways of Israel preaching “repent and believe the Good News, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!” (c.f. Mark 1:15, etc.) Sin leads to desolation, but the Good News is that for everyone who believes the Good News of Jesus, death is not the end; He will restore, redeem, revive, and resurrect what sin has ruined. So the Gospel in Daniel 8 is that as bad as it gets, while we wait for Christ, He has not left us or abandoned His people; He hears our prayers, He knows our suffering, and He has a plan to make things right. Daniel’s vision showed Daniel’s people, the Jews, that after Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the people were scattered among the nations, and Moses’ warnings of the dreaded evenings and mornings of desolation came true, the Prince of Princes who sovereignly decreed even such long centuries of desolation because of their sin, was always standing ready to save: *“if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray*

and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin (2 Chr. 7:14 ESV)

Desolations are decreed because of transgression

Gabriel tells Daniel to look for yet another much more devastating enemy not in the Persian Empire, or in the Greek Empire, or even in one of the four Greek successor kingdoms, but in a new kingdom to emerge from either Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, or Egypt. [read v23] By the time Jesus was born, these four Greek kingdoms were taken over by the Roman Empire in the century before Jesus was born. But they weren't destroyed. In Daniel's first vision, in ch. 7:12, the defeated beasts lose their dominion, their dominance, but their bodies survive. And Greek-speaking Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt all outlasted the Western Roman Empire itself. And for centuries they were more or less Christian lands—and they aren't anymore... so what happened? Desolations were decreed at the hand of a new kingdom. A) At the end of the lifetime of the four Greek kingdoms; B) Not another Greek-speaking kingdom belonging to territory once ruled by Greece (because then it would be a horn of the goat, not a horn from a horn), see verse 9; C) But a kingdom growing out from new territory added to one of the four horns (that's what verses 8-9 force us to look for); D) Not an individual only, but a kingdom like all the other horns in Daniel's prophecies; E) started by a cunning deceiver and liar (see v23); F) at a time when the "transgressors" (the Jewish people) are near their end (v23).

Back in verse 9 we saw a prediction of the geographical spread of this kingdom (exceedingly great southward, then eastward, then toward Israel). In verse 10 we saw the spiritual extent of this kingdom's power: rivalling and even overtaking some of the astrological deities that the pagan nations worshipped (which the Jews were condemned for worshipping in Jeremiah 8:2, Deut 4:19, 2 Kings 23:5, etc.). In verse 11 we saw that this king will exalt himself against Christ Himself (the Prince verse 25 calls "the Prince of Princes"), will stop people from the regular worship of Christ, and will destroy the place of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Now let's see what Gabriel explains to Daniel in verses 24-25: [read v24] If we make a list of these clues we find he will: have great power that's not his own; cause fearful destruction; succeed in what he does; destroy mighty men; destroy "holy people". [read v25] deceit will prosper under his hand because of his cunning; in his heart he will make himself great; without warning he will destroy many; he shall stand against the Prince of princes; he will be broken without human agency.

You should know that most commentators think this horn is one of the kings of Greek Syria (of the Seleucid Kingdom) named Antiochus IV. Some of the details sort of seem like Antiochus, but Isaac Newton nailed it when he pointed out some problems with that suggestion:ⁱⁱ

- Antiochus wasn't a new kingdom but part of Seleucid Syria already
- This horn grows exceedingly great" but Antiochus never expanded the kingdom
- This horn was strong and unstoppable but Antiochus did what Rome told him to do
- The horn is bold and fierce, but Antiochus was frightened out of invading Egypt (after he failed to conquer the capitol the time before) when an elderly senator from Rome drew a line in the sand that Antiochus did not dare to cross.
- Verse 24 says this horn is powerful with someone else's power--Antiochus' power was all his own;
- This horn stands against Christ, robs Christ of worship; Antiochus was long dead when Christ was born.
- This horn destroys the place of the Temple, Antiochus polluted the temple, but left it standing.

The clues only fit one suspect as far as I can tell: One of the four kingdoms (v22), Greek-speaking Syria, when it was under Roman control, took over the Nabatean Kingdom in stages between 62BC under Pompey, and finally in 106AD Trajan made it part of the province that ruled from modern Bosra in Syria all the way south to Hejaz in what today is Saudi Arabia. 400 years later, out of the southern-most tip of Roman Syria, a new kingdom was founded by Muḥammad ibn `Abdullāh. His original territory was the Hijaz, part of which had been governed by Syria.ⁱⁱⁱ Mohammed's religious and militant kingdom grew, first south further into Arabia, then east into Persia, then northwest toward Israel. As the empire grew it spread Islam with it and snuffed out the worship of Christ. After conquering Jerusalem, a Greek Christian church on the Temple Mount was destroyed and replaced by the Aqsa Mosque that still stands there today.^{iv} To name just one of the examples of when a Muslim Empire trampled "the holy people"--i.e., "Christians"--underfoot, on April 24, 1915 (102 years ago this week), the Muslim Ottoman Empire began a genocide in which 1.5 million Armenian Christians were murdered.^v Verse 25 says this kingdom "will *stand* against the Prince of princes", against Christ Himself as history shows. Even making Mohammed a prophet on par with Jesus, making Mohammed's teaching final over Jesus', and setting generations of Mohammed's followers against the followers of Jesus Christ. He brought religious war to the Middle East. A fire that no one has been able to put out ever since--a conflict where Christians and Muslims have done great wrong to one another in the name of religion. But two things stand out as final: the Prince of princes will one day, according to verse 14, "restore the sanctuary" in Jerusalem from the devastation it has suffered; and this horn, this religious and anti-Christian tyrant, will be broken. Ultimately by the hand of Christ Himself (v25). And interesting note on the 2300 "days" is that if days stand for years in the vision—as seems to be true in Daniel—then using the Hebrew calendar, 2300 years is the time from when the 4 horns in verse 8 arose (after the Battle of Ipsus in 301BC) until the trampling of the "place of the sanctuary" ended in the Six Day War in 1967.^{vi}

[**read vv 26-27**] The vision was not for Daniel's time, it was for a time a long, long time later. The "vision of evenings and mornings"--the days and nights of dread that Moses prophesied would be the long desolation of the Jewish people--it is true. History tells a frightening story of a nation that just would not listen to the message Jesus proclaimed, "repent and believe the Good News". There is desolation, but there will also be restoration! It's a frightening message because I think all of us are tempted to ignore Jesus' warnings that sin leads to destruction, but humility and repentance leads to salvation. But Daniel was appalled and went about his business for the King of Babylon, until about 12 years later, as we read in the next chapter, he begged God for forgiveness, not just for himself, but for his people. He did not make excuses for their sin, but confessed it. And God sent Gabriel to him again, this time with a prophecy of a Saviour, a promise of Good News. But that's the sermon for next week. But this week we can finish this chapter with this thought: thank God for forgiving our sin--though our guilt was very great!--thank God for sending Jesus. The Prince of princes is also the Prince of Peace.^{vii}

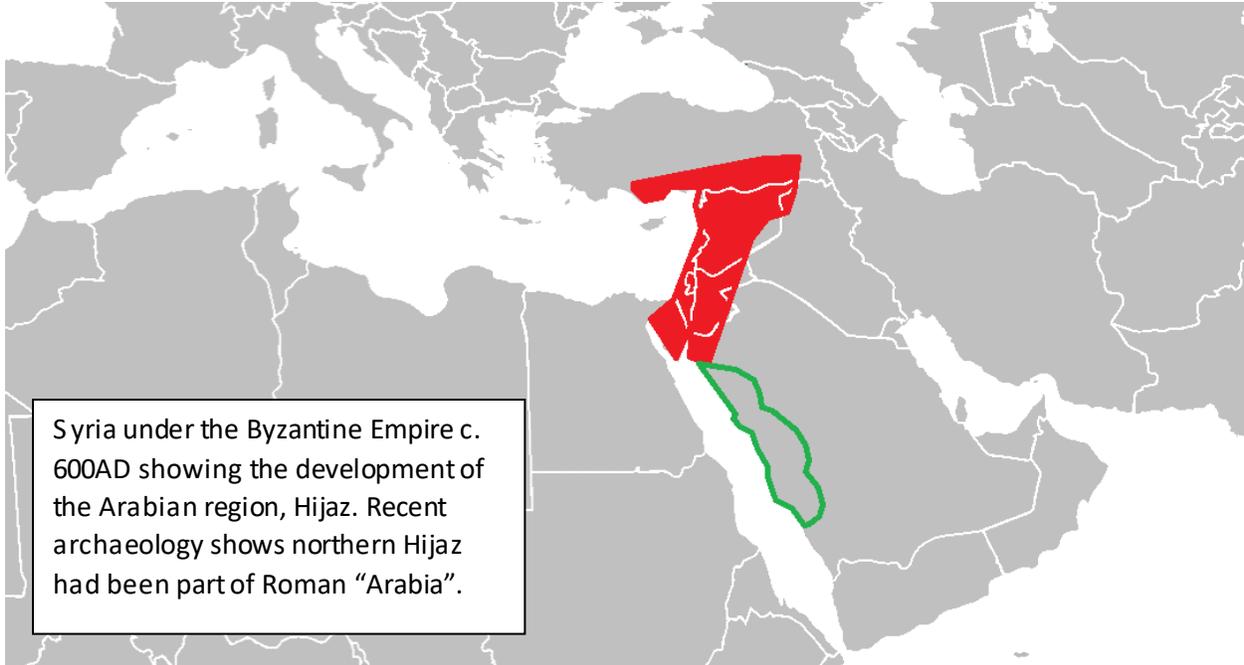
Maps below



Syria under the Seleucid Kingdom c. 75BC



Syria under the Roman Empire c. 117AD, showing it's expansion into Arabia.



ⁱ Keil and Delitzch, *Old Testament Commentary* (Online Bible edition), "Dan 8:12-13"

ⁱⁱ Summarized from Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* [Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, 1991 edition, pp123-124; "chap. 9" in other editions]

ⁱⁱⁱ In 106AD, Emperor Trajan ordered the Governor of Syria, Cornelius Palma, to annex the Nabatean Kingdom by force, creating the Roman Province "Arabia Petraea"

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aulus_Cornelius_Palma_Frontonianus], Accessed April 27, 2017. So it was that one of the four Greek horns, Syria, acquired new territory, the Nabatean Kingdom, including the norther Hijaz, out of which grew Mohammed's original kingdom. Also see the southern-most extent of Roman occupation in Arabia in formerly "Hegra" in Hijaz: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mada%27in_Saleh#Roman_era], Accessed April 27, 2017.

^{iv} Jerusalem Post, "WAS THE AKSA MOSQUE BUILT OVER THE REMAINS OF A BYZANTINE CHURCH?" Accessed April 27, 2017 [<http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Was-the-Aksa-Mosque-built-over-the-remains-of-a-Byzantine-church>].

^v https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Genocide

^{vi} $(2300 \times 360 = 828,000; \text{divided by } 365.25 = 2266.9; \text{add } 1 \text{ because no year zero between BC and AD}) - 301\text{BC} = 1966.9\text{AD}$. Using Hebrew years of 360 days and modern years of 365.25 days.

^{vii} The same word in verse 25 for "prince" as in Isaiah 9:5.