

Daniel 8: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 June 2021

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Daniel chapter 8. In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. And I saw in the vision, and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both 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 beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great. As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground, and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal. And he ran at him in his powerful wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him, and struck the ram, and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground, and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it, together with the regular burnt offering, because of transgression. And it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me, For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state. When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Uli, and it called,

Gabriel, make this man understand the vision. So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened, and fell on my face. But he said to me, Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end. And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up. He said, Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end. As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia, and the goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great, but not by his own power, and he shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men, and the people who are the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many, and he shall even rise up against the prince of princes, and he shall be broken, but by no human hand. The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now. And I, Daniel, was overcome, and lay sick, for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision, and did not understand it. The narrative chapters of Daniel ended in chapter 6. Chapter 7 opened up a series of visions which occupy the rest of the book. Chapter 8 continues on from chapter 7, drawing upon many of its themes. However, chapter 7 was a transitional chapter between the Aramaic section of the book, from chapters 2 to 7, and the later visionary chapters. Chapter 8, along with the rest of these chapters, is written in Hebrew. In chapter 8 we find a new vision of beasts, but this time it's not the bear and the leopard, but a ram and a goat, two sacrificial animals. Perhaps this is an indication of the greater scope of covenant concerns in this period. This vision, as we've noted, connects with what happens in chapter 7. The vision of the preceding chapter occurred in the first year of King Belshazzar, and this occurs in the third. In his vision, Daniel is in the citadel of Susa, elsewhere referred to as Shushan. This site would later be the capital of the Persian Empire, so it seems appropriate that it is here that he sees the rise of the ram. The ram is described as having two horns. The Medo-Persian Empire is a single entity. At its beginning, the kingdom of media is the most prominent. However, through Cyrus, Persia comes to greater prominence. Persia, in this vision, is the higher horn that comes up last. The two-horned ram corresponds with the bear of the preceding chapter, and the raising up of the bear on one side relates to the dominance of

Persia within the confederacy. This is, within this vision, represented by the higher horn that comes up second. The ram in this vision, later explicitly identified as Medo-Persia, challenges those who identify Media and Persia as two separate empires in chapters 2 and 7. The ram arises in the east, but it charges westward, northward, and southward. We might associate its northward conquest with Lydia, its westward conquest with Babylon, and its southward conquest with Egypt. While Daniel is considering the ram, he sees another creature rising up, a male goat coming from the west. The west here is the region of Greece. To this point in biblical history, the dominant powers had chiefly come from the north, the south, and sometimes the east. After this point, however, powers of the west would become increasingly important. The male goat from the west is enraged at the ram. Greece suffered a very great deal at the hands of the Persians, and were only too keen to get their revenge. The male goat moves without touching the ground. This corresponds, of course, with the winged leopard of chapter 7.

The conspicuous horn of the male goat is readily identified as Alexander the Great. In the period of about 10 years, Alexander the Great forges an empire of almost unprecedented size.

[7 : 01] He utterly breaks the two-horned ram, sweeping over the kingdom of Persia. The ram is cast down to the ground and trampled upon. This might refer to the decisive victory at Gaugamela in 331 BC. At the height of the male goat's power and pride, his great horn, Alexander the Great, is broken. Alexander dies at 33, and his kingdom is divided into four chief parts. This connects with the four heads of the leopard in chapter 7. James Jordan argues that these are four successive phases of the Greek empire, the final one being Hellenistic Rome. More commonly, and I think correctly, people associate this with the splitting of the kingdom after the death of Alexander into regions roughly corresponding with Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, Syria, Babylonia and the East, and then Egypt, Judah and Arabia Petraea.

Many people identify the small horn here as the little horn of chapter 7. However, while that horn related to the power of the Roman beast, this horn relates to the Greek beast. It also arises out of one of the horns in a way that suggests that the horns exist simultaneously, not in succession as Jordan suggests. The figure in view here seems to be Antarchus IV Epiphanes, a ruler of the Seleucid dynasty who was a cruel persecutor of the Jews. He arose from the dynasty that had taken control of Syria and Babylonia after the death of Alexander, the Seleucids. He was successful in war against the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, groups in the east, and most importantly, Judah. It is important to remind ourselves that the story that's being told in these prophecies is not focused upon what makes the biggest bang on the stage of earthly history, but is rather focused on the history of the people of God and the way that the covenant and God's purposes within it are working out in history.

In terms of this, while they may seem to represent a backwater from the perspective of many of the great empires of the time, Jerusalem and its temple are the very centre of the world. The significance of Antarchus IV Epiphanes is seen in his direct assault upon the worship of the people of God, actions that would later spark the Maccabean revolt. He sought to replace the worship of God with the worship of Jupiter Olympias. He abolished the daily sacrifice. Antarchus supported Hellenising Jewish factions. Menelaus, the extreme Hellenising high priest set up by Antarchus, had Nias III, the legitimate high priest, killed. A pagan altar, the abomination of desolation, was established upon the true altar, and a pig was slaughtered in sacrifice. The period of the giving over of the sanctuary is declared to be 2,300 evenings and mornings. Scholars differ on whether this is a reference to 1,150 days, measured in evening and morning sacrifices, or 2,300 days.

Jordan sees some symbolic resonances of this number, referencing the reign of Jehoash. In 2 Kings chapter 12, he observes the 23 years period of time in which money was collected and no repairs were made.

At this point, Jehoash and the high priest repaired the temple. Behind this, Jordan sees the story of Athaliah. Athaliah was killed in her seventh year, after reigning for a period of time that would have been in the region of 2,300 days. He argues that we can presume that the true worship of the Lord was cut off during that period, later to be restored during the reign of Jehoash. Taken as a literal period of 1,150 days, it might refer to the period of time between 167 to 164 BC, the period prior to the rededication of the temple. The man, or the angel Gabriel, is charged to teach Daniel concerning the meaning of the vision. Daniel is told that the vision refers to the appointed time of the end.

[10 : 50] It is likely that we should see events surrounding Antiochus IV Epiphanes as prefiguring and anticipating events that happen at the end of the period of the beasts. Antiochus rose to power through deceit, subversion and intrigue. However, his reign came towards the end of the period of Seleucid power in Judea.

A few decades after his death, Judea enjoyed semi-autonomy, and then from around 110 BC, under the Hasmonean dynasty, enjoyed independence as an expanding kingdom. The cunning Antiochus set himself against human authorities, and also divine authority. His rising up against the Prince of Princes is presumably a reference to his assaults upon the Jews, the Prince of Princes perhaps being Michael the Archangel. However, this proud king would be overcome, not ultimately by human might, but by divine. While other powers in this chapter had no one to come to their aid when they were assaulted, the people of God have the Lord on their side, and although they may be seriously persecuted and even martyred, they will not finally be overthrown.

A question to consider, how can this chapter be related to broader themes within the book, for instance, the relationship between divine and human sovereignty? ■■■■■

[illegible]