



Two more beasts * Daniel 8
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Daniel 8:27 is not the kind of verse you want to see when you're a preacher. Chapter 8 is all about a vision that Daniel has and in the final verse, verse 27, Daniel says "I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding."

That's doesn't lend itself to a great sermon. When the author himself says 'this is beyond understanding,' it can be pretty hard to understand. So I've made the decision not to do a whole sermon on it, but I did want to briefly address it as a fascinating, albeit complicated, vision of the future.

Let me just read it for you – Daniel 8, starting in verse 1-

NIV Daniel 8:1 In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. (So again, we're going back in time, to the period of Belshazzar's reign, after the dream of the four beasts).

2 In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.

3 I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.

4 I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

5 As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

6 He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage.

7 I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power.

8 The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

9 Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land.

10 It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.

11 It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low.

12 Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

13 Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled--the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?"

14 He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

So, just to recap – we’ve got a ram with long horns that rampages around the countryside and nobody can stop him. Then, out of nowhere, a goat appears and breaks the ram’s horns. The goat himself has a big ole’ horn and he too rampages around the countryside and no one can stop him. Then its horn is broken off but four more take its place and then there is another, that grows in power and attempts to rival God for supremacy. When he fails at that, he tries to stop others from worshiping God by forbidding sacrifices for 2, 300 mornings and evenings.

At this point, Daniel was probably thinking ‘Somebody PLEASE tell me what’s going on!’

15 While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man.

16 And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision."

17 As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."

19 He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end. (Ok, so we're dealing with end times stuff here).

20 The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. (So Daniel, who is currently serving Babylon, gets advanced warning that another kingdom is coming).

21 The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king.

22 The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.

23 "In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise.

24 He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.

25 He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

26 "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

27 I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding. (Dan 8:1-27 NIV).

How are YOU feeling? Exhausted? Complicated, isn't it? But now, with the benefit of history and the unfolding of God's Word, I don't think that it really IS that hard to understand.

Let me break it down for you.

The two horned ram – that’s the Medes and the Persians. The horn is a symbol of power in ancient cultures and so you have two powers united in one beast. That’s the empire that will gobble up Babylon under King Darius (from chapter 6).

The Medes and the Persians though (and much of the known world) were gobbled up by the Greek goat – none other than Alexander the Great. He took over the Ancient Mediterranean in a stunningly short amount of time – it was indeed like his feet never touched the ground.

When Alexander died though, his kingdom was split into four parts, each governed by one of his generals and so you’ve got ‘four inferior kingdoms’ emerging from the big one. This is the Ptolemies and Seleucids and Antigonids – Cleopatra in Egypt was a Ptolemy.

From the Seleucids though came a ruler who thought himself the very incarnation of Zeus and so he was known as Antiochus Epiphanes (‘The Appearance!’) (IV). Among his exploits, Antiochus IV attempted to systematically overthrow the worship of God in Jerusalem and redirect toward himself, going so far as to sacrifice a pig on the altar of YHWH, in order to make an offering to Zeus.¹ Not the way you make friends with the Jewish God. He was ultimately overthrown and God’s people continued to worship God.

Daniel didn’t know all that when we wrote it down though. He’s still sitting around in Babylon, under the playboy prince King Belshazzar and he’s the only one with this advance knowledge of what was yet to come. From our vantage point though, we can look back at this and say - wow, God called it exactly as it would happen. The goat took out the ram and tried to take out the temple, but he was overthrown by the power of God.

But here’s the thing. This being apocalyptic prophesy, there is still more to it than what’s already happened. Verse 17, Daniel is told ‘this is what will happen ‘in the end,’ but the end hasn’t happened yet and so there must still be an ‘end end’ yet to come. Apocalyptic always has an ‘already’ and a ‘not yet’ component to it. It’s always what is and is to come.

And the NT agrees with Daniel in what is yet to come. In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks His own apocalyptic prophecy and says (paraphrase) “5 Many will come

claiming to be the Christ but they will deceive many. 9 You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death..." Jesus anticipates that there is another Antiochus Euphron, 'the big one,' yet to come.

And Paul refers to him in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 as the antichrist - 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2Th 2:3-4 NIV).

What Antiochus IV did in Jerusalem, the Antichrist will do on a cosmic level, in an attempt to overthrow God.

And of course Revelation 13 refers to a beast who will attempt to deceive many and sway them to worship him rather than God.

All of this to say that what's here in Daniel 8 HAS HAPPENED (in part) in history and WILL HAPPEN in full at the end of the age.

When this era is over, the Antichrist, Antiochus IV on steroids, will come and attempt to wrench people's loyalty away from God. And he will succeed in many cases. He will pollute the worship of God and persecute the people of God. But just when it appears that he is winning, God will flick him off like you would a mosquito (Revelation 19:19) and God's people will dwell with Him in eternity.

That's the message at the heart of Daniel 8. As a history guy, I find it incredibly interesting to see how accurate these prophecies line up with actual lived history, but the historical details are not the most important thing here. The most important thing is the knowledge that no matter what Satan cooks up, no matter how beastly or deceptive he gets, nothing will triumph over God and nothing will destroy His saints. We can draw confidence from the knowledge that God knows what's going on and we can prepare ourselves for what is to come, because we've already been given advance warning.

Really, this closely mirrors something Jesus said in John 15:1-4:

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.’

These things are coming, but we can be ready, because the Bible tells us so.

ⁱ Now Antiochus insisted on a forced paganization programme, meant to corrupt and decimate every aspect of Israel’s faith and practice. This scheme called for the abolition of the Temple cult (practice of Temple worship) and of the observance of the Law, and the substitution of pagan cults. The observance of all Jewish ordinances, in particular those relating to the Sabbath and circumcision, was prohibited on pain of death. In every town in Judaea sacrifice was to be offered to the heathen gods.

Overseers were sent everywhere to see that the royal command was carried out. Where the people did not comply willingly, they were obliged to do so by force. Once a month a check was made, and whoever was found with a scroll of the Torah or had had a child circumcised, was put to death. On 15 Kislev of ... December 167 B.C., a heathen altar was built in Jerusalem on the great altar of burnt-offering, and on 25 Kislev the first heathen sacrifice was offered on it.

That sacrifice was offered to Olympian Zeus, to whom the Jerusalem temple had been dedicated. A little taste of Antichrist ahead of time. (Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, The Bible Speaks Today series, Daniel 8, section 2.d.).