

(PP) As we've been studying Daniel I've been reading the text of Daniel a lot

- Trying to understand it better; the language, the history, the context
- I've also been using several good commentaries to guide me

But as I read this week I wanted to see what others were saying about Daniel 8

- I wanted to get a more popular take on what people thought of this chapter

If there's one thing the Internet has done it has been to give a voice to many people who may not have had one without it

- The Internet has really served to disseminate a wide-range of opinions

Just for fun I googled Daniel 8 to see what I'd find

- And some of the responses were interesting to say the least

(PP) One prophecy website had a picture of the twin towers with a grim warning

- He said Daniel 8 was a startling revelation that deals with the future fate of America

(PP) Another person used Daniel 8 to link our involvement in Iraq

- He said it's very possible that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait could have been the beginning of Daniel's vision.
- A beginning that started and stalled with George Bush Sr but is continuing with his son, George W. Bush.

(PP) Yet another asked this question based on Daniel 8: could the United States be represented in the actions of one of these beasts?

I should have arranged it with Pam to play a menacing sound on the organ right about now...duhn-duhn-duhn!!!

(PP) But seriously, after checking out a few sites, I began studying the history of the interpretation of Daniel 8 and what I found surprised me even more

- Several cults and splinter groups have actually split off of orthodox Christianity based on their questionable interpretations of this chapter

William Miller, whose teaching gave rise to the Adventist Movement, based his teachings on the Second Coming of Christ on Daniel chapter 8

- He believed Jesus was returning on October 22, 1844
- But when the sun rose as normal on October 23rd, it gave rise to what Millerites would call the Great Disappointment

Several other groups picked up his teachings and ran with them

- One of them was Charles Taze Russell who formed the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses
- They forecasted Christ's coming in 1874, then 1914, then 1925, then 1941, then 1975.
- From what I could find, some of their belief came partly from their interpretation of Daniel chapter 8

So do you think we could use a more sane approach in our study today?

Do you even think the primary reason for God giving this prophecy could have been for Daniel's day and for the Jews living back then?

- *Maybe not just for our day and for the United States?*

That's not to say this passage doesn't apply to us

- I think you'll see that it speaks powerfully to our day and time
- But there's more ways for Scripture to apply than just telling us when the United States will be bombed or when Jesus will be returning

God can speak through a prophet and give a powerful word that can be fulfilled thousands of years ago

- But the message and the truth will still resonate powerfully today

I believe as we study Daniel 8 you will see that it primarily deals with those Jews being held captive in Babylon back in Daniel's day

- They were about to return to their homeland to resume their old way of life
- But God wanted them to know that a day of great evil and persecution was going to be coming again in the future
- However no matter how bad things became, God would always be with them

This chapter is actually one of encouragement and hope, a message of assurance that the future was in God's hands

- And that's a message that helps God's people in every generation

No matter what you're facing today

- God loves His people, He is watching out for His people
- And He will be with you until the end...whenever that may be

(PP) So let's read now the actual content of Daniel's vision

- **Verses 1-14**

Once again the passage begins by telling us when this vision takes place

- (PP) Verse 1 says it is in the third year of King Belshazzar
- So this vision takes place a few years after the vision of chapter 7

We're still back around 550 BC

- Daniel and the Jews are still being held captive in Babylon

In previous chapters we've been told about the fall of Babylon and the rise of these other kingdoms

- Today we will learn even more about who they are

Now an interesting thing takes place in the text here that we need to take note of

- You can't see it in English but the language chapter 8 is written in changes from Aramaic to Hebrew
- If you have a good study Bible it should have a note about it here or in the introduction

Aramaic would have been the common language Daniel would have used when speaking to the Gentile world

- But Hebrew would have been the language he would use to speak to his people, the Jews
- So that's one of the reasons I think the main focus of this prophecy was for the Jews back then

But something else is happening here in the text that is worthy to mention

- (PP) It will be easier to show you than explain it

The way Daniel is laid out the first half of the book and the second half of the book overlap and contain a similar structure

- Aramaic is the yellowish color and Hebrew is the blue
- The type of language and the content of the chapters help you see a structure that tells you the order and layout of the book were planned
- This too helps us understand what he is saying

So what would God want to say to these Jewish exiles?

- *And what would this ram, goat and horn have to do with all that?*

And something else we'll look in to later:

- *What does all this have to do with us?*
- *How does this vision apply to our lives today?*

Well in this vision, Daniel sees into the future and to what will come after the Babylonian empire falls

- He sees the Medo-Persian Empire, Alexander the Great's empire, and the Hellenistic empires that succeed it.

This prophecy today will warn them that terrible times will be coming

- But they should take heart knowing that God rules over everything and that He still cares for them

(PP) Verse 3 tells us about the ram he sees in the vision: **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.**

(PP) Now for an interpretation we have to look no further than verse 20: **As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia.**

We've been hearing about these kingdoms for several weeks now in Daniel

- At the time this was written Babylon was the dominant world empire
- But God had revealed that in the coming years first the Medo-Persian empire would conquer the world, then the Greeks, then the Romans

(PP) Verse 3 is so precise that it even notes that of the two horns on the ram, one is higher than the other

- That is significant because of the Medes and Persians, the Persian king was stronger, or higher in influence

(PP) Verse 4 even goes on to tell us that the ram, or Medo-Persia, would spread larger and greater than any known kingdom on earth at that time

(PP) 2 Chronicles 36:23 contains the testimony of Cyrus himself, the king of Persia, on how wide his kingdom spread

- **"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.'"**

Isn't it amazing what God is revealing here?

If I were to put this in terms we could relate to

- It would be like having a list of American Presidents for the next 600 years
- Even going so far as to describe them

I can only imagine how this would read if it were written about past American Presidents...

- Maybe as it spoke about Abraham Lincoln it would mention that he was a tall man and he died while in office
- Maybe George W. Bush would be seen as a cowboy coming from the west...

What we're reading here is a bit like those prophecies by Nostradamus that people talk about

- The difference is that the Bible is accurate **all** the time
- God is giving specific information about every kingdom to come

He next gives detailed information about the kingdom to come after the Medo-Persian kingdom

- Daniel's vision next tells us of another animal coming to attack the ram

(PP) In verse 5 we are told of a new empire, described here as a goat: **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.**

The passage goes on to speak of the fury and speed with which this kingdom conquered the world

- That's why verse 5 says he didn't even touch the ground

(PP) We don't have to wonder for long who this is being written about

- Verses 21-22 say: **And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. ²²As 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.**

There is no doubt that this is speaking of Alexander the Great

He came from Greece, which was to the "west" of Babylon and Persia.

- He conquered the Persian Empire with amazing speed which was why he was represented as a leopard with four wings in chapter 7

But what's so amazing about this prophecy is how it describes what happened after Alexander's untimely death at the age of 33 in 323 B.C.

- After his death, four of his generals divided his kingdom into four parts just as it says in verse 22

And it's at this point that the main point of chapter 8 is introduced

- It's at this point that God warns His people of the trouble to come
- Because from out of these four leaders one would rise who would cause terrible trouble for the Jews in coming years

I know they experienced trouble while in captivity in Babylon

- I'm sure they would have trouble upon returning back to their homeland
- I'm sure there would be difficulties through the next two world empires
- But trouble on a scale that had never before been seen was about to come their way through one of these four successors to Alexander

God was telling them he would be coming so when the time came they would not lose heart

- He wanted them to be prepared and ready
- He wanted them to know that He would still be with them

(PP) We begin to learn about this new world ruler in verse 9: **Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land.**

Scholars are unanimous in recognizing this little horn as the eighth ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, Antiochus Epiphanes

The Seleucid dynasty was the eastern remnant of the former Greek dynasty

- So Daniel's prophecy is precise in saying that he came out of them

Antiochus was one of the most despicable, savage leaders in history.

- In this vision, Daniel saw the suffering this tyrant would inflict upon his people
- So that's one of the reasons Daniel was so disturbed by this vision

(PP) If you go to the end of the chapter verse 27 says:

- **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 reason he was sick for days and appalled was because of what he saw

(PP) Verse 10 describes what Antiochus' growing kingdom would be like and how he would treat God's people: **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.**

God's people are being referred to here as stars

- The Bible says you are the light of the world

But wherever the light seeks to shine, darkness tries to stamp it out

Verse 24 says that Antiochus would cause great harm to God's people

- (PP) It says: **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.**

According to Jewish history recorded in 1 Maccabees

- Antiochus tried to unify his kingdom by making the Jews give up their customs and the Law of God
- In the process he murdered many Jews

After a failed military campaign in Egypt, Antiochus came back through Palestine and plundered the temple in Jerusalem

- It was said that he murdered 80,000 Jewish men, women and children
- He even had the high priest put to death

(PP) When we read verse 11 we see Antiochus' waging full-scale war against God and the people of God

- He has exalted himself to god-like status and even put an end to temple worship in Jerusalem

Verse 11 says: **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.**

To further humiliate the Jews and to further exalt himself

- Antiochus desecrated the temple by erecting an altar to Zeus in the temple of God
- Sacrifices were also put to an end

When we get to chapter 11 we'll learn even more about this act, called the abomination of desolation

The text describes this here by saying he threw truth down to the ground and trampled all over it

However at this point we are introduced to two more characters in the vision

- Two heavenly messengers come to Daniel at this point in the vision and ask a question out loud for Daniel's benefit

(PP) Verses 13 and 14 close out this part of the vision by saying: **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?"¹⁴ And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."**

The one angel is asking out loud: *How long will the sacrifices be stopped?*

- *How long will God's people be persecuted?*

The other angel gives him the answer

- 2,300 days
- Almost 6 and a half years

But as disturbing as this prophecy of future trouble has been, verse 14 ends on a more positive note

- At the end of this period of time, the persecution will end and the temple will be restored to its rightful state

I won't go into much more detail, but just as God said

- About three years after the altar to Zeus was set up in the temple
- On the day of December 14, 164 B.C., the Jews, led by Judas Maccabeus
- Cleansed and rededicated the temple

That date may not mean much to you except for the fact that it's near Christmas

- But you've probably heard the name of the Jewish celebration that comes from this event
- To this day, right around Christmas, Jews still celebrate the feast of Hanukkah
- Commemorating the rededication of the Jewish temple

Well that brings us to the end of the vision here in Daniel 8

We've covered quite a bit of history this morning!

- *So far, almost 400 years worth!*

(PP) Maybe you feel like Daniel here at the end of verse 27

- **I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it**

If you're confused, hopefully when we apply some of these truths it will make more sense to you

- But before we make application, there are a few ideas hanging around that I want to explain further

First, I have been approaching Daniel's vision today in a past-tense sense, in a fulfilled sense

- Saying that the vision we are studying today was fulfilled by Antiochus
- That God was giving the vision primarily to His people who would be living during the time when Antiochus was to come

But there is something about this passage that speaks about a time yet to be

- A time in our future
- To the time when the antichrist and the great tribulation comes

I say this more than anything not from chapter 8, but from what we will learn in successive chapters of Daniel and from other places in the Bible

Daniel 9 talks about it more but it seems to me that Daniel 8 makes reference to it as well

(PP) However Matthew 24:15 makes it clear for me as it says: **So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)**

The event it is talking about refers to Antiochus coming in to the temple and erecting the statue of Zeus

- Of murdering the high priest
- There are even reports that he sacrificed a pig on the altar to dishonor the Lord

So even though I see the primary purpose of this vision being for the people of God in Antiochus' day, warning them of the trouble to come

- I also see Antiochus as a type, a foreshadowing, of the antichrist
- But since we will study this theme more next week I'll leave it there for now

And there's one last thing I want to mention before we begin applying this

- *What does it mean here in verse 26 when it talks about sealing up the vision?*

(PP) Daniel 8:26 says: **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.**

I've heard people say this means the vision was to be sealed, kept secret, un-interpreted, until a later time

- They say God was keeping the meaning secret until the end of the world
- That at the end of the world God would reveal His hidden plan for mankind

Some interpreters say only they have been given the secret meaning

- One of them you may remember was David Koresh and the Branch Davidians
- They believed the fulfillment of Daniel would take place in Waco, TX

But the meaning of sealing up the vision is not keeping it secret

- This is God's Word, He wants it shared with people
- So the meaning is more of preserving the vision, writing it down, rolling it up and preserving it for future generations

Think of it like this...Antiochus would not come on the scene for another 400 years after the time of Daniel

- The antichrist would be many thousands of years after that
- So Daniel was to preserve the vision and guard it so people could read it in future generations

The book of Daniel blesses you and me today precisely because he **did** seal it

- He obeyed God so all generations from that day until today could read it and be instructed by it

And so this leads us now to the last thing we need to talk about today

- *What exactly is God instructing us in this passage?*
- *What application should we make of this to our lives?*

Well I've always thought the best application comes when you best understand the text and its original meaning

- You then take that meaning and find application to our day

So put yourself back in the lives of those Jews in Daniel's day who received this vision in the first place

They were about to be released from captivity and were going to return to the promised land

- They were about to return to Jerusalem where they would rebuild the temple.

In the euphoria of that time, they might wrongly conclude that the promised kingdom of God was about to come.

For them, going back to Jerusalem and back to the temple was like heaven coming to earth

- I'm sure some of them thought the world was going to end and God's visible Kingdom was about to come to earth
- They never thought they'd see another bad day again...

So God was warning His people that the end of the world had not come yet

- In fact, there were going to be many long, hard years ahead

However in spite of warning them about even worse years to come

- This is a message of hope and encouragement, not of despair

God was giving this vision to let them know that even though bad days were coming

- He would be with them until the end, whenever that day would be

You want to know how to apply this passage?

Two ways, and I can find both of them in one verse

I feel like I've said this already a dozen times since we've been in this little book

- But one, life is hard
- And two, God will be with us

Jesus said in John 16:33: **I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**"

Boy pastor, that's a real encouragement

- *Life's hard, then you die*
- *Thanks for the good news today*

But this **is** good news

It's good news because this world isn't the end

- There **is** another world coming

It's good news because **God himself** is here with us

- Even through the hard times

And it's good news because Christ has overcome the world

- He died in our place for our sins at the cross
- He rose again from the dead
- He offers eternal life and abundant life to all who turn from their sins and believe

Is anyone here today struggling?

- *Suffing?*
- *Going through difficulty?*