

## **“DANIEL’S VISION OF A RAM AND A GOAT.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Daniel 8:1-14**

### **Introduction.**

We have concluded the historical section of Daniel which fills the first six chapters. In those chapters we saw how God sovereignly and powerfully worked in a pagan country and through pagan kings to aid and benefit His captive people.

When we turned to chapter 7 of Daniel we came to the prophetic half of the book. Chapter 7 was the pivotal chapter. In chapter seven, in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a vision of a lion, a bear, a leopard and a beast with ten horns.

The vision covered human history from the time of Daniel to the end of time, in other words chapter seven ended looking as a time that is far beyond our time. Daniel 7 is an overview of history, of what God is doing and going to do. It is a tool for reading the newspaper and listening to the news and putting our history in a larger context.

This book is a survival manual for the saints. It removes unrealistic expectations and gives realistic expectations. It takes away the element of surprise just as Jesus did for His disciples:

**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.

In chapter eight, in the third year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a vision of a ram and a goat, and a great fight between them.

Chapter eight is a vision of a piece of history that was future for Daniel but is long in the past for us. It is a snapshot of history from around 539 to 331 BC.

In his vision Daniel sees himself by the Ulai canal in Susa, the capital city in the province of Elam. This is about 200 miles east of Babylon, north of the Persian Gulf, in what is today Iran.

Susa would become in a few years the leading city in the next empire, the Persian Empire. This was the city where Nehemiah and Esther lived.

These historically and geographically specific details prepare us for a different kind of vision, a vision that is historically specific.

### **The Ram, Daniel 8:1-4.**

First, Daniel sees a ram with two horns, one bigger than the other. The ram came from the east and charged north, west and south. He was very powerful, so powerful no animal could stand against him and none could resist him or be rescued from him.

We are told this ram was impervious to destruction, untouchable, above all others. And because of this it became proud and puffed up, just like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. When it says it became great, it means it became great in its own eyes.

We will be told in the interpretation that the ram represents the kings of the Medes and the Persians. The larger horn is the Persian empire which was huge and dominated all the surrounding nations. It was swift, fierce, and unstoppable.

Verse 4 covers about 200 years of history. There is a lot of political history and change crunched into those few words. Daniel can't know all that will happen in what little he has said.

### **The Goat, Daniel 8:5-8**

Suddenly out of nowhere, something happens no one saw coming, no one expected. Daniel saw a vision of a goat charging out of the west, so fast it seems like his feet don't touch the ground. The goat smashes into the ram, shatters its horns and destroys it.

So much for no animal being able to stand against the ram or resist it. It turns out the ram is powerless against the goat.

We will be told in the interpretation that the goat is Greece and the large horn represents the first conqueror from Greece, Alexander the Great, who conquered the entire Middle East by the time he was 30. He conquered Persia with swift and intense force, and spread the Greek empire even farther than Persia, all the way to India. These verses cover history from 331 to 323 BC.

He was a brilliant military leader and accomplished his victories at a breathtaking pace. When he died his kingdom was replaced by four smaller kingdoms, indicated by four horns.

### **The Little Horn that became Great, Daniel 8:9-12.**

In this part of the vision, the great horn is broken and one of the four new horns started small but grew very great.

A king will arise from small and obscure beginnings. Three times the word great is used of this king (9, 10, 11). The implication here is not just great in power but in ego, this king will have great arrogance. He will be great in his own eyes.

And as is often the case with the most arrogant or ego-maniac leaders, they even dare to oppose and defy God. He opposes the worship of God and persecutes God's people. We see that happening in verses 11 and 12. These verses cover history from 187 to 164 BC.

From a merely earthly perspective it looks like the little horn takes on God and wins. And this is often the case in history and in our own experience. It looks like God is losing. It feels like the church is declining in power and authority.

What is Daniel thinking at this point? Daniel knows from the prophets that Israel will be in exile in Babylon for 70 years. Daniel knows the 70 years is almost over and God's people will be restored to their home land and they will rebuild their temple and resume temple worship and the sacrifices.

But now he is hearing there is a down side to that good news. Tyrants will trample on God's people and their worship.

God is in control, but that doesn't mean His people won't be caught in the struggle and conflict. Bad things will happen, people's lives will be disrupted, even destroyed and killed.

Our confidence isn't just for this life, it is for the life to come. Don't fear those who can only kill the body, fear only the one who can kill the body and the soul. If we are in Christ then we have nothing to fear in the long run.

### **The Voice, Daniel 8:13-14.**

Two interesting things happen in verse 13. First, it's an angel who speaks and asks questions, not Daniel. It appears that the angels have a sympathetic interest in our history and wellbeing.

Second, the question asked is not a why question, but a how long question. Suffering is a given, the question is just how long.

Remember Jesus' words, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

But for how long? The answer is 2,300 evenings and mornings. The Jewish day begins with sun down, so evenings and mornings is how they would say days. You may recall

that's how each day of creation was described, "there was evening and there was morning, the first day."

It's a fairly lengthy time of suffering and affliction, but nevertheless a limited time. It doesn't go on and on, it's calculated in days, not years.

### **Lessons from world history and lessons for our personal history.**

*First*, the Bible is filled with specific historic and geographical details. It is a real book about real people in real places. It is non-fiction. God is the God of history or as we like to say, history is His Story.

*Second*, our faith grows out of the soil of the Middle East, out of Iran and Iraq and Syria and Jordan and Israel. We are a multi-ethnic, diverse people. Heaven will be truly international, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic.

*Third*, that part of the world continues in the news to this day, 2,500 years later. God is still actively at work in those parts of the world. Nothing happens that is reported in the news happens without God's direct involvement and activity and purpose.

There is no other plan, but God's plan. It is His will and His purpose that is being accomplished. God's plans and purposes in history are never in jeopardy, no matter however much it might look like it.

**Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

**Ezra 1:1** In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.

In the year of our Lord 2017, God appointed that Donald Trump should be the president of these United States. That doesn't mean Donald Trump is Christian or a good man. God has raised up and used far worse men and far better men. It just means Donald Trump is not bigger than God, he is a pawn in the hands of God who is moving him where He wills, to do what He wills.

This is God's world and God is in control of it.

**Isaiah 46:8-11** "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors,  
9 remember the former things of old;  
for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,  
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

*Fourth*, have you ever played king of the hill as a child? You stand on top of some mound of dirt, you are king of the hill, defying anybody to knock you off. But it's lonely at the top, everybody is gunning for you, you have lots of enemies.

It's tough to be number one, because everyone is out to get you. The undefeated, number one ranked Alabama football team got beat by a tenacious and determined "nothing to lose" Clemson team in the final 6 seconds of the National Championship game.

Everyone is out to beat Alabama, and until then no one was able. They looked unbeatable.

Nations that seem great and unbeatable, fall in a heartbeat. Nations are fragile and short-lived, even for the mightiest. Life is fragile and short, even for the most health and fit.

One thing is certain, history is anything but peaceful and calm, sweetness and light. Our little corner of relative peace and calm has lulled us into a false sense of reality and a false sense of security.

Empires rise and fall, nations come and go, great leaders rise up and then die or are killed. Nothing lasts, everything changes, history is dynamic and fluid, there is an ebb and flow.

Once invincible and impregnable kingdoms fall. Proud rulers are brought down.

Remember when the builders of the Titanic said even God couldn't sink this ship, and she went down on her maiden voyage.

Daniel's visions are visions of human history, of one nation over-powering another in rapid succession.

Jesus summed up history this way.

**Mark 13:7-8** When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

**John 16:1, 4** "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ...4 But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

**Fifth**, if we believe in God, that has consequences. One consequence is that then we must also believe that life has meaning and purpose and history has meaning and purpose even if it isn't clear to us.

God is good and all His ways are good, so all things must work for a final good. Goodness and righteousness and justice and truth will in the end be vindicated. And wickedness and evil in the end will be defeated and destroyed.

All will be made right and shown to be right. And all the earth will be humbled and silenced before so holy and righteous and good a God. There is none like Him in all the earth.

**Sixth**, we would be wise to consider in our personal lives how aptly warfare imagery applies and how often Scripture uses it for us in our own lives.

We are at war against an enemy, not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. If we fight in our own strength, if we boast in our own ability and accomplishments, we will fall as quickly as we rise. History proves it with all the great warriors. But if we will depend on God, we will prevail and be victorious.

**Romans 8:35, 37** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...

37 No, *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

**Ephesians 6:13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

It's a daily battle to put off sin, impatience, selfishness, pride, anger, lust, pettiness, critical attitudes. It's a daily battle as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as brothers and sisters.

So as we train and fight so let's train our children and grandchildren to fight against their own sin, against their own battles at school, on the playground, at home.

Let us learn to use the tools every day of confession, repentance and forgiveness and reconciliation.

Let us be confident the battle belongs to the Lord and He gives us the victory.