

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 22

Daniel, Lecture 2, Daniel 8

Daniel 8:1-2 Daniel's Elam Vision on Belshazzar's Reign

Daniel chapter 8 is one of the easier chapters to interpret, so I think it's a good place to start. We read in verses 1 and 2, "In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, a vision appeared unto me, even unto me, Daniel, after that which appeared unto me the first. And I saw in a vision that it came to pass when I saw that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in a vision; and I was by the river Ulai." Now, you can ask the question of those first two verses, was Daniel in Elam? "I saw in a vision and it came to pass when I saw that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam." Was he there in person, or only in a vision? Seems to me most likely it's in a visionary context that he finds himself in this place. The place, however, is significant, because Shushan was the capital of Elam.

In Daniel's time, Elam and Shushan were within Belshazzar's kingdom. They weren't particularly significant place, however, but later Shushan became the capital of the Medo-Persian Empire, and it became a great city. In fact, it was a city inhabited until the Middle Ages. It's known today as Susa. The height of Persian rule was, of course, subsequent to the time of Daniel. But the vision that he receives goes forward from Babylonian time to Persian times then on into Greek times. So this is the place in which he finds himself in this visionary situation.

Daniel 8:3-14 Ram and the He-Goat Vision

Then you read in Daniel 8:3-14 of his vision: "I've lifted up mine eyes, and I saw. And behold, there stood before the river a ram, which had two horns, and the two horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. And I saw the ram pushing westward and northward and southward, so that no beast might stand before him. Neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand. But he did according to his will, and became great. And as I was considering, behold a he-goat came from the west over the face of the whole earth and touched not the ground. And the goat had a

notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran into him with the fury of his power. And I saw him come close into the ram. He was moved with anger against him and smote the ram and broke his two horns. And there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and stamped upon him, and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. Therefore, the he-goat grew very great, and when he was strong, the great horn was broken and for it came four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven and out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south and toward the east and toward the pleasant land. And it grew great even to the host of heaven, and it cast down some of the hosts and of the stars to the ground and stamped upon them. Yet he magnified himself even to the prince of the hosts, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of the sanctuary was cast down. And a host was given to him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression. And he cast down the truth to the ground; and it continued and prospered. Then I heard one saying, speaking unto another, and said unto the saint that spoke, ‘How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifices and transgression of desolation to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?’ And he said unto me, ‘Unto 2,300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.’”

That’s the vision that he saw. So verses 3-14 describe the vision. Notice there are various animals depicted: a ram with two horns initially, then a he-goat with a single notable horn between his eyes that he smites that ram with and breaks the two horns. Then in verse 8, “After that he-goat grows great and the great horn is broken and for it came four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.” So you have these four notable ones arising, and then verse nine says out of one of them came a little horn that grew great. Now clearly, the animals and the horns are to be understood as a series of symbols to depict certain events. The question is, what are the events? In this chapter there are questions about some aspects and features of the chapter, but for the most part there’s not a great deal of doubt because further on in the chapter you have an interpretation given. Chapter 8, verses 1-14, you have this vision of the ram and the goat, but then when we

ask what it means, when we get to verses 20-27, there you have an interpretation of the vision.

Daniel 8:15-19 Introduction of the Interpretation of the Vision

Now, before getting to that interpretation, we can cover that up for the moment, there's another thing we want to look at before looking at verses 20-27. Verses 15-19, introduce that interpretation. You have in verse 17, you read that this Gabriel, who is going to make Daniel understand this vision, comes near and you read, "He came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face. But he said unto me, 'Understand, O son of man, for the time of the end shall be the vision.'" So you have that expression in the latter part of 17, but then you read. "As he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face toward the ground, and he touched me and set me upright. And he said to me, 'Behold, I will make thee know.'"

Notice the last part of 19: "I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation, for at the time appointed, the end shall be." So at the end of verse 17 you have, "the time of the end shall be the vision." The end of verse 19 is "in the last end of the indignation, for at the time appointed, the end shall be." You can ask the question, what's that mean? Does all the vision relate to the end of the age? How are we to understand those expressions: "At the time of the end," "At the last end of the indignation, at the appointed time the end shall be." Now, I think that's a question to keep in mind as you look at the interpretation. I might just say here that E.J. Young suggests that what's in view with those expressions is the end of the Old Testament period. The phrase, "at the latter part of the indignation," is the time God's judgment on the people of Israel before the establishment of the New Covenant. So it is the end of the Old Testament period, the time before the establishment of the New Covenant. Just keep that question in mind and let's go on to the interpretation, found in verses 20-27.

Daniel 8:20-27 Interpretation of the Vision, Alexander's Conquest of Medo-Persia

In verse 20 you read, "The ram which thou sawest having two horns, these are the

kings of Media and Persia.” So you go back to verses 3 and 4, and you can read 3 and 4 with a little more understanding because 3 and 4 says, “I beheld this ram it had two horns, the two horns were high. One was higher than the other and the higher came up last. And I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward. So no one could stand before this ram.” It’s interesting the way verse 3 says the ram had two horns, the two horns were high, but one higher than the other. The higher came up last. That suggests that Media was important before Persia was. And that fits with what we know of the history of Media and Persia. The Medians became independent of Assyria at about 631 B.C. The Persians began as an insignificant section of the Median Empire. But the Persians rose to control the Median Empire, and that was done largely through Cyrus, who brought Media under his control. Many Medes were given places of responsibility in the kingdom of Cyrus, but you see the picture there fits very well. This ram has two horns; the two horns were high. One was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. That’s the Persian element of the Medo-Persian kingdom. I’ve got a map here of the Persian Empire, just to give you an idea of its extent. The area with those lines goes up through Asia Minor, well down into Egypt, and well up toward the East. So that’s verse 20 of the interpretation, “The ram which thou sawest having two horns, these are the kings of Median and Persia.”

Then we go on to verse 21: “And the rough goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.” And you read verse 21. I might just mention before going on to that, you notice in verse 4 that ram pushed westward, northward, and southward so that no one could stand before him. That is exactly what we see there with the Persian Empire, westward, north-westward, northward, and southward, so that no beast might stand before him. And then verse 5: that he-goat from the west verse 21 identifies as the king of Greece. See, verse 5 says, “As I was considering, behold the he-goat came up from the west over the face of the whole earth but touched not the ground. And the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns and ran into him in the fury of his power.”

Alexander the Great attacked the Persian Empire. Alexander pushed coming from

Greece, and was able to destroy Persia. And you notice verse 5 says of this he-goat that he came from the west over the whole face of the earth and he touched not the ground, an indication of the rapidity of his conquests; he was very swift.

And then verses 6-7 describe the way in which Alexander took Persia: He smote the ram, and broke his two horns, there was no power in the ram to stand before him. And he cast him to the ground and stamped on him, and the he-goat grew very great.” Now, when you look at Alexander’s conquest, the black line on the map gives you the extent of Alexander’s kingdom. It was a swift conquest, but involved a number of key battles. In 334 B.C., you had a battle at the River Granicus, which is right here in northwestern Asia Minor. That was the first victory in Asia Minor over the Persian forces in 334. One year later, you have the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C., right there at the northern corner, where the Mediterranean turns south along the Asian coast. Alexander crossed the Taurus mountains, defeated the main Persian army at Issus, and that enabled him to come down the coast and take Syria, Palestine, and on into Egypt. So, we have a key battle, the Battle of Issus, in 333. In 331, way to the east, Arbela, at the Battle of Arbela, he destroyed the last Persian army, won the empire and then he moved on from Arbela towards the Indus River. So you see that’s from 334-331, three years. He swept away the Persians.

But you read in verse 8, “The he-goat grew very great, and when he was strong, the great horn was broken and for it came four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.” You may wonder what does that mean? And then you look at verse 22 that says, “Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nations, but not in his power.” And what you find, historically, is when Alexander was at the height of his strength, he died at 33 years of age. So when he was strong, the great horn was broken, as verse 8 says. So you have an enormous kingdom and, a powerful man. He dies very young, so what’s going to happen to his kingdom? He had an illegitimate child of two or three years old, so he didn’t really have a suitable son to take over his throne. He had married a daughter of the king of Persia a few months before his death, and some thought maybe a child will come from that relationship. There was a lot of confusion and a struggle for power, but within a few years what happened

was that Alexander's empire broke into four parts. Initially into five, but that part wasn't stable and it settled down into four parts with several of his generals seizing large areas of his empire for themselves.

Division of Alexander's Kingdom

Those kingdoms looked something like this on the map in 301. You have Macedonia under Cassander, Thrace and Asia Minor under, initially under Lysimachus and Antigonus. Lysimachus up here, Asia Minor under Antigonus, and then Syria to the east under Seleucus, and Egypt to the south under Ptolemy. The rule of Antigonus did not last long, so you basically had Seleucus, Ptolemy, Lysimachus, and Cassander as the four parts. It's Antigonus who didn't last long. It was Antigonas who was overthrown by Seleucus. So you get four parts then, that survive: Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus. "Four kingdoms," you read in verse 22, "shall stand up out of the nation but not in his power."

Who is the King with the Fierce Countenance

Then you read in verse 9, "Out of one of them," that is, one of these four kingdoms, "came forth a little horn which grew exceedingly great." And you ask what is that? And then you go over to the interpretation, verse 23. "In the latter times of the kingdoms," that is, these four kingdoms, "when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance and understanding dark sentences shall stand up, and his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power. And he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper and continue, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his powers, also he shall cause deceit to prosper and his hand shall magnify himself and his heart. By peace he shall destroy many; he shall also stand up against the Prince of Princes, but he shall be broken without end."

So in the latter times in this kingdom, the king with the fierce countenance is going to arise. In other words, it's not right at the beginning. And the question can be asked, who is in view here? Is this the Antichrist who is to come at the end of the age?

You see, verse 17 says it's "a time of the end shall be the vision." Is this the antichrist at the end of this age? Or is there some reason to think that it is not the Antichrist? I think verse 9 is quite clear. Verse 9 says, "Out of one of them." And who's the "them?" It refers back to the four notable ones, toward the four winds of heaven, the four parts of Alexander's kingdom. This person's going to rise out of one of the four parts of Alexander's kingdom. So you're in the context of Alexander's empire and its divisions, and a ruler is coming out of one of those divisions. So I think what you have in chapter 8 is that the Lord gives a vision to Daniel to show the Lord's people that after the Persians, who had taken over Babylon in Daniel's time, after the Persians will come the Greek empire, and that in the course of time the Greek empire there's going to be a great difficulty to face--this king of fierce countenance who is going to arise.

Antiochus Epiphanes

Historically, we know that in the Seleucid Empire, one of those four divisions, Antiochus Epiphanes became a strong ruler. He conquered the Ptolemaic empire, or almost conquered it as that struggle went back and forth. "He magnified himself," verse 11, "He magnified himself even to the Prince of the Host." You notice his name, Antiochus Epiphanes, that Epiphanes means "manifestation of God." He felt he was a manifestation of God. He viewed himself as the manifestation of Zeus, the Greek god. He wanted to be worshiped, and from what we know of him, he exhibited the characteristics that are described here. He stormed Jerusalem and defiled the temple.

The background for that was this: he had gone down into Egypt and was just about to defeat the Ptolemies of Egypt when the Romans sent a force to Egypt because they did not want the Seleucids to consolidate their power over the Egyptians; it would be too major a power. The Romans had their own ideas about controlling the Mediterranean, so they sent a force to Egypt, and this Roman general met Antiochus just outside of Alexandria. And there's the story told about their encounter. They, in fact, had known each other because Antiochus had been a prisoner in Rome some time earlier. But this Roman general, Popellius Laenas, told Antiochus that he had to give back the area taken

and vacate Egypt. We have heard a lot in this Desert Storm War in Iraq recently about drawing a line in the sand. I think that the origin of that expression comes from this incident because this Roman general drew a line in the sand, a circle, around Antiochus. Antiochus said he wanted time to consider the demands of the Romans, and this Roman general draws this line in the sand around him and he says, “Look, you tell me before you step over that line.”

So Antiochus was humiliated, and he knew he didn’t have the forces to fight the Romans, so he had to retreat. When he retreated, he vented his anger on the Jews. He came into Jerusalem and defiled the temple and broke down the walls of the city, sold women and children as slaves, and banned the Jewish faith. Observance of the Sabbath and circumcision were forbidden on the sentence of death. The Old Testament scriptures were burned, images of Greek gods set up in all the cities of Judah, and the Jews were forced to worship them. If you didn’t do it, you were tortured and killed. In the temple itself a kind of altar was erected on which swine were offered just to antagonize the Jewish people, and the whole temple was sprinkled with fat from the offerings of the swine. The result was the Maccabean revolt around 168 B.C.

The Romans had just defeated Macedonia in the third Macedonian war. So they had been, themselves, expanding eastward into Macedonia. They must have been fairly powerful. And they’d just come off another victory. So it must have been quite a force. I’m not sure, you know, the numbers, but it must have been a force significant enough that Antiochus was intimidated. I want to look a bit further at verses 9-14. There’s some rather obscure phrases there. So let’s stop at this point and we’ll go a bit further with Daniel 8 beginning in our next hour.

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