

# Are We There Yet?

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

Daniel 8:1-27

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When you're on a road trip, what's the one question you can count on your kids asking? "Are we there yet?" It doesn't matter if it's a long trip or a short trip. On Labor Day we drove to Udall to visit Keith and Cindy Call. It's twenty-six miles to Udall. And Isaiah asked me three times, "Are we there yet?"

Why do all kids ask this question? Sometimes it's just because they're so excited to get where you're going. But usually they're just sick of riding in the car. It's long. It's uncomfortable. And their brothers and sisters are so annoying! All kids are excited about arriving at the destination, but they don't want to endure the pain of the trip. So, they cry out, "Are we there yet?"

Different parents answer this question differently. Some will humor their kids and say, "It's not much further," even if it's another three hundred miles! I'm of a different breed. I usually say, "Chill out; we're not even half way there yet!"

As believers we also ask if we're there yet, in a way. When things get tough in our life or ugly in the world—like they are right now in our world—it's normal to wonder how much longer we have to endure. We're excited about our final destination. But we're done with the discomfort of this life. We're weary of this godless world and the opposition we face. We can't wait for the day when God's kingdom will be finally and fully established. So, we cry out, "Are we there yet?"

My wife asks me all the time, "Do you think the Lord will return in our lifetime?" I don't know the answer to her question. But what I do know is Christ will return and set this world to its rights. And I know that until he does return, we've got a hard road ahead of us. We need to persevere as we wait. But knowing this long road will come to an end is what gives us the strength and perspective to ride it out.

Daniel is clear. The Lord's establishing an everlasting kingdom and the kingdoms of this world will be brought down. But until that day comes the kingdoms of this world collide with one another and with the kingdom of God. Daniel gives a realistic picture of how long and hard the road really is. But he also paints a hopeful picture of our final destination.

In Daniel chapter 8 we find Daniel's second vision. His first vision was a wide-angled shot of world history, beginning in the sixth century BC and going all the way to the return of Christ. But the vision in Daniel 8 is more of a zoom lens on history.<sup>1</sup> It covers roughly four hundred years. I believe most of it has already been fulfilled. But the lessons it teaches provide a pattern for how history works and a lesson for how to live our lives today as believers.

Chapter 8 is organized like chapter 7. There's a vision and then an interpretation. What I'm going to do this morning is walk through the vision and draw in the interpretation as we go. The vision is divided into three parts. We see a ram, a goat, and a little horn. Each of these correspond to real

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fyall and Robin Sydserff, *Teaching Daniel: From Text to Message*

people in history. So, as I explain the passage, it's going to feel a bit like a history lesson. But then at the end, I want to show you how the lesson we learn from this history is relevant for us today.

## THE RAM (1-4, 20)

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Let's begin with the first part of the vision.

### Daniel 8:1-4<sup>2</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the capital, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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 this vision begins, Daniel is swept away from Babylon to Susa. It's as if he's on a magic carpet ride.<sup>3</sup> And God says to him like Aladdin said to Jasmin, "I can show you the world." Susa is in the realm of the Medo-Persian Empire. And it's there at the citadel of the Medes and Persians that he sees a vision of a ram.

Notice the way the text describes this ram. It's standing on the bank of the canal (v. 3). And no beast could stand before him (v. 4). He's a charging ram who knocks down all who try to stand in his way.

The ram has two horns. And in the Bible horns represent power, usually the strength of a ruler. And so, it's no surprise that when we turn to the interpretation section we see that this ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The shorter horn represents Media and the longer horn Persia, led by the great conqueror Cyrus. Verse 20 says, "As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia."

## THE GOAT (5-8, 21-22)

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But in verses 5-8 the ram gives way to the goat.

### Daniel 8:5-8

*<sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.*

The goat's so fast that it moves across the whole earth without its feet touching the ground. It only has one horn, right between its eyes, like a unicorn. The ram was great, but the goat is exceedingly great. No one could stand before the ram, but the ram can't stand before the goat. He ran at him and hit him like a linebacker hits a tight end running a drag route across the middle.<sup>4</sup> He knocks his

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<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> David Helm, *Daniel for You*

<sup>4</sup> Helm

lights out and knocks his helmet off. Then the paramedics cart the ram off the field. His season's over!

But eventually the goat's horn is broken. And four more horns emerged in its place.

As verses 21-22 tell us, the goat refers to Greece. And the prominent horn is surely Alexander the Great who rose quickly to power and had all but conquered the known world by the time he was twenty-six years old. In 334 BC he came against the forces of the Persian Empire. He had 335,000 troops. The Persians only 100,000. Alexander's army killed 20,000 Persians and only lost 100 of their own men.<sup>5</sup> Alexander completely destroyed them! Game over.

But Alexander died at an early age and his kingdom was divided among his four generals. These four kingdoms vied for power for one hundred years.

One of the kingdoms was located around Syria. And from that kingdom arose what Daniel 8 calls the little horn.

## THE LITTLE HORN (9-18, 23-26)

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### Daniel 8:9-14

*<sup>9</sup>Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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?" <sup>14</sup>And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."*

The little horn refers to Antiochus. He ruled in Syria. He was a power-hungry man. But he had a lot of bills. So, he used his force to get money out of different countries. He even set his sights on Palestine, the glorious land. The text says that he grew great even toward the host of heaven, which refers to the saints, or the Jews (v. 24). And he became great even as great as the Prince of the host, which refers to God. What this means is that Antiochus not only opposed the people of God. He even opposed God. He wasn't actually great, but as verse 25 says, in his own mind he was as great as God.

Most history books will mention Cyrus and the Persian Empire. They will certainly refer to Alexander the Great. But who has ever heard of Antiochus? He was a small-time king on the world stage. But he receives the most attention in Daniel 8. Why is that? It's because of how horrible he was toward the Jews.

He had the high priest murdered and put one of his lackeys in his place. When he was on a military campaign in Egypt, there was a false report that he died. So, the Jews tried to re-establish the priesthood. When Antiochus found out, he was outraged. The book of Maccabees tells us he killed forty thousand Jews in one day. He also desolated the temple. He entered the Holy of Holies and set

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<sup>5</sup> Ligon Duncan, "[The Dream of the Ram and the Goat](#)"

up a statue of Zeus. He stopped the regular sacrifices. And he had a pig scarified on the altar, as well as humans. He also prohibited circumcision and keeping the Sabbath.

As you can see, he was a really evil man. Far worse than anything your annoying brother has ever done to you on a road trip. Far worse than anything we face as Christians living in America in the twenty-first century. So, it's no wonder that at the end of the vision, in verse 13, an angel asks how long it will last. The answer: "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state" (v. 14).

Twenty-three hundred days is a little less than seven years, which is about the time the Jews suffered under Antiochus' tyranny. There's much debate about the twenty-three hundred days. But the point is clear. The suffering God's people would face would be long and hard under Antiochus, but there would be a limit to it. The road would come to an end.

At the end of the vision, Daniel was perplexed. He didn't know what it meant. So, he sought to understand it. And the angel Gabriel interpreted the vision for him. I've already drawn in much of his interpretation, but I want to draw your attention to one important thing he said in verse 17: "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.'"

Some people think this means that the vision points to the end of history. But I think it points to the end of the little horn. Gabriel begins with reassurance. There will be an end to the persecution. As verse 25 says, God will defeat him: "And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand."

The pain God's people would endure under Antiochus was great, but an end would come. And that's exactly what happened. In December of 164 BC Judas Maccabees led a revolt and put an end to the desolation of the temple. And he restored right worship. This was God's doing. And it's a day Jews still celebrate every December. It's called Hanukkah.<sup>6</sup>

So, that's the vision and the interpretation. The history lesson is over. But what does this vision mean for us today? If the things referred to in this vision have already come to pass, how is it relevant for us?

## RELEVANCE FOR US TODAY

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While this vision referred to a very specific time in history, it also repeats a pattern we see throughout the history of God's people. A pattern that will continue all the way to the end.

Ever since the beginning of the world, there have been people who rise up and oppose God and his people. But God will call his enemies to account. Remember Cain and Abel. Or remember the exodus. Israel was oppressed for four hundred years, but then judgment came on Egypt and God brought his people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. God gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, but then he brought judgment on Babylon. And Antiochus wreaked havoc on Israel, but he was destroyed by God.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Helm

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons*

Last week, we saw in Daniel 7, that there is another little horn that will rise up in the last days. The New Testament calls him the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18). Jesus says that one day the abomination of desolation, the one spoken of in Daniel, will stand in the holy place (Mt. 24:15). He will speak against God and wear out the saints (Dan. 7:25), but Jesus will defeat him and establish his everlasting kingdom (vv. 26-27).

We know the antichrist is coming. And until that time, many antichrists will come (1 Jn. 2:18). Whether it's Antiochus or Titus, who desecrated the temple again in AD 70. Or any number of people throughout history who oppose God and his people.

We know the end is coming too. We know we'll arrive at our destination. But we need to know that however long it is until Christ returns that the road will be hard. Jesus wants us to know that.

When we ask, "Are we there yet?" we're not told how much further, but we're told how to travel until we get there.

Jesus says, "Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Mt. 24:36). "Therefore you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (24:44). And the way we show we're ready is by being faithful all the way to the end (24:45). We endure the pain with the hope of the promise in our hearts.

That's what we see in Daniel's life. At the end of the passage in verse 27, we see how he responds to the vision: "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."

Christ may return in our lifetime. But he may not. Our destination may be right around the corner. Or it may be a thousand miles away. So, what should we do in the meantime?

Since we know Christ is coming to set this world to its rights, should we simply abandon the world? After all, it is going to hell in a handbasket, right? That wasn't Daniel's response. Sure, he was troubled. So troubled he had to call in sick for a week. But then, he got up and got back to work. He continued to serve the wicked king of Babylon and he continued to serve the King of heaven.

The same should be true for us. Things are bad in our world. And we ask how long? We know that the end is coming. But being heavenly minded shouldn't make us no earthly good. For Daniel, his heavenly perspective drove him to faithful earthly service. And it should do the same for us.

We should seek the good of the city even as we wait for the city not made with hands.