

How Long?

SERIES: DANIEL: LIVING BY FAITH IN A FAITHLESS WORLD

In his book, *Lion and Lamb*, Brennan Manning writes: "Contemplating the crib (meaning, looking at Jesus while loving Him), the Christian's faith flames into joyous expectation that the Christ who came in history will one day come in glory. Paul writes in Colossians: 'When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory' (Colossians 3:4). Here, Paul refers to a future event. Christmas arouses longing for the Parousia, the Second Coming. It awakens hope in that heralded upheaval, that upcoming earthquake that makes radical discipleship possible, ushering in as it will the ultimate fulfillment of human history.

"Christian hope is neither Polyanna optimism nor fragile wishful thinking that yields to discouragement and defeat. On the contrary, hope, a glimpse of the breakthrough for which Jesus stands, remains firm and serene in the face of terminal cancer.

"Several years ago a priest visited a sixteen-year-old girl who lay dying in a Phoenix hospital. She looked into his worried and grief-stricken face, he recalls, and said to him, 'Don't be afraid.' This is the precise meaning of Christian hope: 'Don't be afraid.' It is most profound when the dying can say to the living, 'Don't be afraid.'

"Christian hope stands confident in the face of the... turbulent Persian Gulf, the powder-keg we call the Middle East, the agony of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua. Hope remains unruffled by all the legalists, Puritans,... party-poopers, and prophets of doom that have appeared on the scene since that memorable midnight when Mary spanked her baby and the infant Jesus screamed joy into a hushed and waiting world."

Christmas is not just about the past coming of Christ, it's about the future coming of Christ. Many of us claim to believe that, but it really doesn't impact the way we think and live. It usually takes some intense personal suffering to loosen our white-knuckled grip on this world and begin to really long for Jesus to come back and make things right. That's why it's not unusual in times of difficulty for followers of Christ to ask the question, "How long? How long, O Lord, will the suffering last? How long will injustice and evil be able to reign supreme? How long until you say, 'Enough?'"

In Daniel 8 the prophet has another vision of some horrifying things that would one day happen to God's people. In the midst of that vision, the question is raised as to "How long will this be allowed to continue? When will God say, 'Enough?'"

In his previous vision Daniel saw a panorama of history. Four terrifying beasts represented four evil kings and their kingdoms that would rise up between Daniel's day and the end of history. In this vision, Daniel gets more information on two kingdoms that would rise up in the next few hundred years. It's important to keep in mind that for Daniel the vision was about future events that would directly effect Israel, but for us these are now past events. We have the unique opportunity to see how this prophecy has been fulfilled. But, there is something else:

history has a way of repeating itself, so as we look at this past history of Israel, we will also be looking into our own future.

This passage can be divided up into two main sections. In vv. 1-14 Daniel recorded his vision, and in vv. 15-27 Daniel received the interpretation of the vision from an angel. In working through this, I'm going to place the vision and the interpretation side by side so we can see precisely what is meant. But let me warn you; we are traveling through some pretty rough Biblical terrain today. These passages have an element of the bizarre in them. If you are new here, please understand we don't do this because we love the bizarre, but because we're committed to teaching through the Scripture.

I. THE VISION OF THE RAM AND THE GOAT

Daniel begins by giving us the setting of his vision,

"In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously. And I looked in the vision, and it came about while I was looking, that I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision, and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal."

This gives us the time and place of the vision. It was two years after his first vision, during the third year of Belshazzar's reign. Babylon was still in power, but here Daniel is taken in his vision outside of Babylon into Susa which was to be the future capital of Persia.

Listen to the first part of the vision,

"Then I lifted my gaze and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him, nor was there anyone to rescue from his power; but he did as he pleased and magnified himself."

We see here an impressive display of power from a ram with two horns. As he butts his head this way and that, everything moves out of his way. He is a picture of self-will and pride. The angel tells Daniel who this is in v. 20, **"The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia."** The Medo-Persian empire as pictured by this ram came into power in a few short years. The two horns represent the combined powers of Media and Persia. One horn is longer because the Persian element was the more powerful of the two. But as the vision continues we see how short-lived this kingdom was,

"While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between the eyes. And he came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I

had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. And I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.”

Here we see an even more impressive display of power. A he-goat with a single prominent horn floats over the surface of the ground as if on a magic carpet and in a violent rage he shatters the ram and hurls him to the ground and tramples on him. If you have ever observed the behavior of male goats, especially in the company of other animals, you know what this is all about. But, once again, we don't have to go far to learn who this is referring to. Look at v. 21,

“And the shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. And the broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power.”

The goat represents the Greek empire. The single horn is Alexander the Great who swept through the Persian empire and conquered it in three years.

There is a fascinating footnote from history on this. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that when Alexander moved his armies from Egypt towards Jerusalem he threatened to take the city. But when the High Priest heard of this, he met Alexander and showed him this scroll of Daniel where he prophesied of Alexander's conquest. When Alexander saw that the Jews predicted he would overcome the Persian empire and rule the world, he spared the city of Jerusalem.

But future Greek kings wouldn't be so kind. In the vision, the great horn was quickly broken off and replaced with four horns. We know that Alexander died suddenly at the age of 33 as he indulged himself with his generals in a drunken feast. He died of a combination of alcoholism and malaria. Though he conquered the world, he couldn't conquer his own passions. His empire was divided among four generals, one of them was Seleucus. Eventually, out of the Seleucid dynasty a king would arise who would spell disaster for God's people,

“And out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper.”

This refers to the eighth king of the Seleucids, Antiochus IV Epiphanes who reigned from about 170 BC. A number of things are said about his reign of terror here, but notice also what is said later in the interpretation of vv. 23-25,

“And in the latter period of their rule, when the

transgressors have run their course, a king will arise insolent and skilled in intrigue. And his power will be mighty, but not by his own power, and he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform his will; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people. And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; and he will magnify himself in his heart, and he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency.”

We can see a number of things about this man. *Notice he is a very impressive figure.* He starts small but he becomes exceedingly great. He's portrayed as a man of great intelligence; he's shrewd and deceitful; he knows how to impress people and win them over. It appears that his reign is one of great prosperity in which people are at ease. We're not surprised that his power comes not from himself but from another power; no doubt from Satan. *Notice second that he is given power to destroy the people of God.* The host of heaven and the stars falling to the ground are a picture of the armies of God, either heavenly armies or earthly armies, being defeated. The reign of Antiochus was indeed one in which many Jews were killed. *The third thing to notice is that he exalts himself to the place of God.* He makes himself equal to the Commander of the Host and opposes the Prince of princes, both of which refer to God. In opposition to God, he brings to an end the twice daily sacrifice in the Temple and he “flings truth to the ground.” This is exactly what Antiochus did. He entered God's Temple, erected an altar to a pagan God, and sacrificed a pig on that same altar. He took the sacred scrolls of God's law and tore them to pieces and burned them with fire. *Finally, notice that God himself will bring his reign of terror to an end.* We are told he will be “broken without human agency.” It seems that somehow God himself would bring this man down. It's interesting, we know that he didn't die in battle as we might expect, but he died of natural causes.

This really is a remarkable fulfillment of prophecy. It should give us great confidence in the Scripture. It's one thing to make predictions; it's quite another to see them fulfilled! In 1938 George Fieding Elliot said, “A Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is a strategic impossibility.” In 1946 Daryl Zanuck, the head of 20th Century Fox said, “T.V. won't be able to hold onto any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.”

But God's word is different because He is the Lord of history. This should assure us that God is not taken by surprise by these things. He's in control. These events would spell disaster for God's people, but they could rest assured that God was still in charge. I hope you know that about your own life. It's so hard sometimes to know what God is up to, isn't it? It can be so confusing to try and understand why things happen. But passages like this ought to encourage us. God is in charge. He is working out his purposes in history; he is working out his purpose in our own lives. We can trust him because his purpose is good! He is for us and not against us! As Paul says, **“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of his glory”** (Eph. 1:11-12).

We can imagine that in the midst of this God's people would wonder, why is this happening to us? Has God forgotten about us? Is he somehow unable to stop this man? When will God step in and do something? The good news is that Daniel got an

answer to that question. Look at vv. 13, 14,

“Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, ‘How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?’ And he said to me, ‘For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored.’”

Twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings refer not to days, but to evening and morning sacrifices, which would come out to eleven hundred and fifty days. Remarkably this fits with what actually happened. We don't have the exact date on which the sacrifices were stopped, but it's likely it was in late 167 B.C. Somewhere around three years later we know Judas Maccabaeus led the Jews in victory and had the Temple sacrifices resumed.

Now let's step back from all of this. Aren't you glad you came to hear this lecture on Ancient Near Eastern History? What does this all have to do with us? It has a lot to do with us. History has a way of repeating itself. And often times, prophecy has more than one fulfillment. That may be why in v. 17 and v. 19 the angel says this vision pertains to “the time of the end.” That could mean the end of the Jewish sufferings under Antiochus, but it could also mean we are to see in these events a picture of events that will come again at the end of history. Listen to what Jesus said to his disciples well over 150 years after Antiochus died: **“The time will come when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about, the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the holy place”** (Mt. 24:15 NLT). He went on to talk about a time of **“great tribulation, such has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will”** (Mt. 24:21 NLT). Does that sound familiar? So then, we have to ask the question, if history repeats itself, what does Daniel 8 teach us about how we should face the future?

II. HOW SHOULD WE FACE THE FUTURE?

If history repeats itself, we can be sure that kings and kingdoms will continue to rise and fall. Weren't you impressed by that vision of the two-horned ram butting its head all over the place? Weren't you impressed by that shaggy goat with the giant horn moving over the surface of the earth like a 747? Weren't you intimidated by that small horn who became so exceedingly great that he reached up into the sky and yanked down the host of heaven and the stars? But in every case they were destroyed. The two-horned ram was hurled down and trampled on. The giant horn on the shaggy goat was snapped off like a pretzel. The small horn that became exceedingly great is broken without human agency. All this is a picture of history. Kings and kingdoms rise and fall.

At the dawn of the fifth century men expected the Roman Empire to endure forever. They called it “eternal” Rome. Christianity enjoyed unprecedented freedom. This was like the “good 'ol U.S.A” Suddenly, however, in the year 410, a barbarian warlord besieged the city. All cries for mercy proved futile. The warriors charged through the gates and plundered the capital. Devastation and ruin were everywhere. Shocked Christians fled in all directions. Some of them arrived in North Africa where they met a Bishop with a slim figure and sharp features, Aurelius Augustine.

They cried out for an explanation. “Why? How could

this happen? Was God angry? Is this the end? How long will this go on? To answer such questions and give his people a reason to go on, Augustine tried to give an explanation for the rise and fall of empires and the personal ups and downs of life. He wrote a book about it called, *The City of God*. He said there are two realities which unite and divide all history, two historical kingdoms or cities, now mingled by world events but one day to be separated. What is the difference between the cities? It's a difference of faith and love. “Two cities,” writes Augustine, “have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God.”

So because of these two realities, we shouldn't be surprised when evil men prosper, injustice rules the day, and God's people come under attack. Bruce Shelley writes, “Few would deny that life in this world is unjust. The rich exploit the poor, the ruthless terrorize the humble, the powerful abuse the weak. Lovable children are denied a stable home and capable couples are unable to have children. Tyrants die peacefully in their beds while saints sometimes die in agony at the stake. Clearly man knows no universal justice in this earth.” Jesus said a time will come when God's people will be the focal point of this injustice. He said, **“An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think he is offering service to God”** (Jn. 16:2).

We're even told that a day is coming when evil will be personified in a man. We live in a personality driven culture. Even churches have often become driven by impressive personalities. Men are placed on a pedestal, sometimes of their own making, sometimes of other people's making. We have to be careful of that. This man will be a very impressive personality. I think he will be a religious man. There will be a veil of morality and goodness that he wears with consummate skill. He will perform miracles, probably miracles of healing. He will create conditions in the world of peace and prosperity. When he first comes on the scene, you and I will want to vote for this man. But we've been warned. His true colors will eventually come out. He will begin to talk as if he himself were God. He will begin to require absolute allegiance. He will put to death followers of Christ. The book of Revelation describes him as “the beast” and says he gets his power and authority from the dragon. The dragon, of course, is a symbol for Satan. Beneath the human element, there is a sinister spiritual force at work which will eventually take root in this man and his rule. This is Satan's last hurrah because right when things seem like they can't get any worse, as God's people are moaning, “How long?”, God will intervene.

You see, if history repeats itself, God will step in and deliver his people at His appointed time. In chapter 7 it was **“a time, times and half a time”** (7:25). Here in chapter 8 it was 2,300 evenings and mornings (8:14). In the book of Revelation it's 42 months. Those numbers aren't given to us so we will try to do some kind of count down to the end, they are given to us so we know God himself has fixed the time of our suffering. Our deliverance won't come from a man; it won't come from the government; it won't come from our politicians; it won't come from a pastor or a counselor; it won't come from our educators; it will only come from God.

A basketball team found itself in a precarious situation. It was about to play for the league championship. Their star player had carried them all season long, but he had been late for a practice that week, and in keeping with team rules he had to sit out

the first half of the game. The team know that all it had to do was get through the first 30-minutes. Even though they would certainly get behind, they were motivated to hang in there because they knew at that 30-minute mark their guy could rescue them. In many ways, that's the situation we are in. God has fixed a time in which we have to fight the battle against what appears to be overwhelming odds. But at exactly the moment of His choosing, we will be rescued and victory will be ours.

CONCLUSION

But what do we do in the meantime? I want you to look at Daniel's response to all this,

"Then, I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it."

There are three things I want you to notice here. First Daniel responded with shock. He was exhausted and sick for days. I don't think Daniel just happened to get the flu. I believe he had a visceral response to this vision that resulted from the shocking nature of what he saw. You know, we ought to be a little shocked by this stuff. It ought to bother us. I just don't think we take it all that seriously. Deep down I really think most of us believe that things will always just go on the way they are now. I went and saw that movie, *Gladiator*, recently. What a great movie! But I walked out of that movie feeling kind of beat up; kind of emotionally raw. You see, I didn't close my eyes. I watched all the gore. That's how we ought to walk out of this movie. We shouldn't close our eyes. We should feel some of what Daniel felt.

Second, Daniel responded with faithfulness. It says he got up again and carried on the king's business. Though he knew that it was all going to fall apart, he continued to be faithful in the place God had called him to serve. Jesus told a parable to illustrate this. It's about a nobleman who went off to a distant country. Before he left he called ten of his slaves to carry on his business while he was gone. He gave each of them a little money and said, "Occupy until I come." That's what we're to do. We're to stay occupied with the the King's business until he comes. Peter said, "The end of all things is at hand..." Therefore, he said you need to do what? He said you need to be people of prayer. You need to love one another fervently. You need to be hospitable. You need to use your spiritual gifts in serving one another. That's the King's business.

Third, Daniel responded with humility. Daniel says he was astounded at the vision and there was none to explain it. Do you know what strikes me about this? It strikes me that even after the interpretation by the angel, Daniel didn't pretend to have it all figured out. Daniel didn't write a book like *1994*. Daniel said here is what I saw and heard but I'm confused as ever. When it comes to the details surrounding the end, we need to exercise humility. The one thing Daniel did know, and the one thing we must know, is that God will make everything that is wrong, right.

That, by the way, is the meaning of Christmas. Henry Longfellow put like this:

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the word repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said.
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep"
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men."*