



## Study 5— What is the World Coming To?

### Daniel 8

In chapter 7 we first encountered a style of writing known as ‘apocalyptic’. Read page 8 again if you want refresh your memory on how we should approach this type of writing. But from chapter 7 to the very end of the book of Daniel, ‘apocalyptic’ is what we read. Throughout these chapters Daniel is given a series of strange visions that are not for the faint hearted! Daniel himself is troubled and terrified by what he sees (7:28, 8:27, 10:11, 16-17). Daniel is almost overwhelmed by the sight of powerful beast-like forces rallying against God and against his people. But at the same time Daniel is given insight into the way God is at work to save his people and bring judgement on all those who would dare stand against Him.

When we studied chapter 7, a note of caution was given—be careful about trying to tie every element of apocalyptic imagery to one particular moment in time. In fact apocalyptic works to give us the building blocks to understand history at any point in time. But when we get to the vision of chapter 8, it does take us to specific historical events. We know this because an interpretation is given.

#### Read Daniel 8

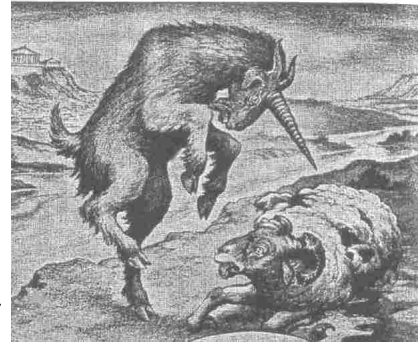
8:1 tells us the setting for when Daniel had this vision—in the 3rd year of the reign of Belshazzar, the Babylonian King. In the vision, Daniel is transported to the ‘citadel of Susa in the province of Elam’. In Daniel’s day, Susa was an insignificant town that would later become the centre of the Persian empire that would eventually supersede Babylon. So even before we get to the content of the vision, we’re given a very strong hint that the vision is concerning a future time.

In the following table are some of the crucial elements of the vision in verses 1-14. Write down the interpretation of these elements given in verses 15-27.

| Verses | Event  | Interpretation | Verses |
|--------|--|----------------|--------|
| 3      | “I looked up, and there before me was a ram”   |                |        |
| 3      | “with two horns”   |                |        |
| 5      | “suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west”  |                |        |
| 7      | “I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns”  |                |        |
| 9      | “The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up”              |                |        |
| 10     | “It grew until it reached the host of the heaven, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them”                         |                |        |
| 11     | “It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low” |                |        |

## A view into history

Medes and Persia is the empire that came after Babylon. It was a united empire with the Persian part arising later and becoming superior in power (*one of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later*). Under King Cyrus who we read about in Daniel 1:21, the empire extended its boundaries and no other nation could stand against it (*it charged toward the West and the North and the South; none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great*). But at the time of the Persians, another figure arose who would dominant the world stage—a Greek known as Alexander the Great. The Persian empire was easily overthrown by Alexander (*suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west; the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns; None could rescue the ram from his power*).



Alexander achieved unprecedented dominion, from Italy to India in an unbelievable time. The conquests of Alexander are recorded in a Jewish piece of writing known as 1 Maccabees 1. It says,

Alexander of Macedon, son of Phillip, had come from the land of Kittim and defeated Darius, king of the Persians and Medes, whom he succeeded as ruler, as first of Hellas. He undertook many campaigns and gained possession of many fortresses, and put the local kings to death. So he advanced to the ends of the earth, plundering nations after nation; the earth grew silent before him, and his ambitious heart swelled with pride.

But just as Alexander's power looked complete, he died suddenly in 323BC at the age of 32 (*at the height of his power the large horn on the goats head was broken off*). Alexander had no natural heir and so his empire was divided amongst four of his generals (*four prominent horns replaced the one prominent horn of Alexander*). From one of these generals arose another leader Antiochus IV (*out of one of the them came another horn*). In 167BC Antiochus invaded Jerusalem. His soldiers entered the temple (*the surrender of the sanctuary*), slaughtered a pig on the altar of the Lord and dedicated the temple to his Greek god (*the rebellion that causes desolation*). In fact history records that Antiochus took the meat of the pig and tried to make some Jews eat it. Those who refused to eat, he cut their tongues out then burnt them on the temple altar. It was a time of great persecution for the Jews (*the host that will be trampled underfoot*).

a) According to 8v25 what will be the outcome of this ruler?

b) How is this a similar outcome to what happens to the kingdoms in the visions of Daniel 2 and 7?

## The pattern of things

If Daniel 7 gave us broad insight into the way the world works and how God is at work in history, Daniel 8 focuses in on an example of the way these forces will be at work in a particular moment in history. But this doesn't mean chapter 8 is there just for our historical/prophetic curiosity. This vision was meant to say something to the people of Daniel's time. And it's meant to say something to us today. It's helpful to realise that the pattern of: 1. a ruler rises up 2. he proudly asserts himself over God and attacks God's people and 3. God brings judgement on that ruler—is a recurring theme. Fill in the following table to see where else this pattern is in the bible.

|  | <b>Isaiah 14:3-23</b><br>'The King of Babylon' | <b>2 Thessalonians 2:1-12</b><br>'the man of lawlessness' |
|--|--|---|
| <b>What is sinful their attitude and actions?</b>        |  |   |
| <b>What is their impact if any on the people of God?</b> |  |   |
| <b>How does/will God respond?</b>                        |  |   |

That's just two passages. But in another setting, another part of the bible was written, the book we know as 'Revelation'. It's a book that has some big similarities with the book of Daniel—it contains strange beasts with horns who rise up against God. These beasts attack God's people and force the world to worship their image. Revelation is another scary apocalyptic vision. And when you read of Revelation (check out chapter 12 and 13 sometime) you wonder - how is God going to defeat these beasts? How will God respond to such proud and wicked rule? How will God make himself known that he is the true King? The answer is—it all centres on Jesus. And in keeping with the apocalyptic style, you might think that God will portray Jesus' rule with the symbol of magnificent animal who has great power and majesty.

**Now Read Revelation 5:1-14.**

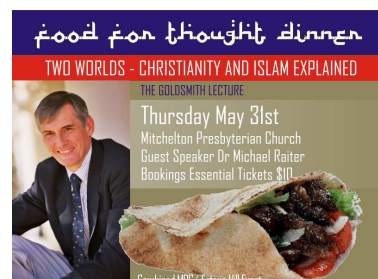
- c) What is so surprising about the animal who appears?
- d) What does this say about the path that Jesus takes to become the King and ruler?
- e) How is Jesus so different to the beasts in Daniel and Revelation?

**How Do You View the World?**

1. How has Daniel shaped the way you view worldly kingdoms and authorities?
2. How has Daniel shaped the way you might expect them to treat those who people who belong to God?
3. How has Daniel shaped the way you should view the future?

**Spend some time praying about these things.**

It's not too late to invite someone. This is a topic that many people are interested in and have questions on. If you have not done so yet, buy your tickets on Sunday. We usually fill the auditorium so bookings are essential.





*"Interaction, relationships, and reflection are some of our key words and goals as we aim to be growing followers of Jesus."*