

He's Got This
Daniel 8:1-27, Matthew 24:1-31

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Do you sometimes feel like the world is spinning out of control? The safe and secure life some of us remember from past years seems more chaotic, less innocent, and somewhat scary today.

Family and cultural values have changed and not always for the better. Religious freedom is under attack.

People have become polarized about politics, race, immigration, immunizations, and economic policies. Government has become manipulated by a powerful few for their own benefit.

We feel powerless since so much is beyond our control. So, we become fearful, frustrated, or confused.

We wonder whether God really has things under control. This is why it's good to study the book of Daniel. These same concerns that bother us today also plagued Daniel.

Daniel reminds us that God's purpose won't be frustrated. It helps us realize that no person, power, or movement can take over God's plan.

As a Jewish exile living in Babylon, Daniel's doing okay, but his mind was still seeing troubling visions from God.

Now, this vision in chapter 8 occurred before the Babylonian Empire was overwhelmed by the Persians in 539 B.C.

It wasn't a dream combined with a vision, like chapter 7, but a vision that came to Daniel during the daytime.

Daniel 8:1-2, *“In the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.*

Now, when Daniel had this vision, he was actually in Babylon. Yet, what he saw happened in Susa.

When the Medo-Persia alliance overthrew the Babylonian Empire, Susa became the capital of the Persian Empire.

If you tried to find it on a modern map, you’d discover that Susa is located in Iran, whereas Babylon is in Iraq.

Elam was the name of the province where Susa was located when Daniel wrote this book, not necessarily when he had this vision.

Eighty years after Daniel had this vision, Susa became Esther’s home. One hundred and seven years later, it was the city from which Nehemiah departed to return to Palestine.

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Daniel 8:3-4, *“I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.”*

This vision may have been strange to Daniel, but we have the benefit of looking back over history and seeing events that happened almost 300 years after Daniel died which correspond with his vision.

This is why I’m showing you these maps so you can understand how his vision fits into history.

The "ram" with two horns that Daniel saw standing before the canal symbolized the Medo-Persia alliance.

The longer horn stood for Persia, which became more powerful in the alliance and displaced Medea in leadership after the two nations merged. Persia pushed its borders primarily in three directions.

An aside here, the guardian spirit of the Persian Empire was portrayed as a ram. When the Persian king went into battle, he always carried the head of a ram.

Also, in the ancient world, different zodiac signs represented various nations. Aries, the ram, stood for Persia.

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Daniel 8:5-7, "As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power."

Normally goats have two horns but if you've studied history, then you know that this is talking about the Grecian empire under the leadership of Alexander the Great. He's clearly the conspicuous horn.

Under Alexander, the Greek armies advanced quickly from the west conquering the entire Near and Middle East within three years, including Persia.

Despite the numerical superiority of the Persian army and their possession of military equipment, like war elephants, the tactical genius of Alexander, along with his disciplined Macedonian phalanx, proved decisive.

Alexander's conquests stand unique in military history and are appropriately portrayed by the lightning speed of this one-horned goat.

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Daniel 8:8, *"The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven."*

When Alexander died at age 33, his empire was divided into four territories. Take note of the size of the Seleucid Empire in light green.

Even though the Seleucid Empire was the larger of the four, over time, as territorial wars continued, it was gradually reduced to what we see in this next map.

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By 169 B.C., Judea ended up in Seleucid territory ruled by King Se-leu-cus VI Phi-lo-pater. But King Se-leu-cus was assassinated by one of his ministers, at which time his brother An-ti-o-chus Epiphanes seized power.

Daniel 8:9-12, *"Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the LORD; it took away the daily sacrifice from the LORD, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the LORD's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground."*

During An-ti-o-chus' reign, some Jews rebelled in Judea, so he went to Jerusalem to quell the uprising. The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees describes the horror of his return.

2 Maccabees 5:10-14, "When these happenings were reported to the king, he thought that Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery."

An-ti-o-chus crushed the revolt, looted the temple, and installed the worship of Zeus. To add insult to injury, he sacrificed an unclean pig on the altar, *"an abomination that causes desecration."*

Daniel 8:13-14, "Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the LORD's people?" He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

In his vision, Daniel asked how long the desecration would last. He was given a cryptic answer so he would be comforted knowing that the sacrilege would end.

Now, don't get caught up thinking the "2,300 evenings and mornings" has some mysterious meaning. It's just the period of time the persecution during An-ti-o-chus' domination of the Jews would last.

This desecration ended when a group of Jews, led by Judas Maccabeus, rebelled. After a bloody and cruel three and a half years of war, the Jews took back Jerusalem.

The temple was rededicated in 165 B.C. with the first celebration of Hanukkah or Feast of Dedication.

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Knowing the history let's read the Bible's interpretation of this vision provided to Daniel.

Daniel 8:15-26, *"While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision." As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end. The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power. "In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.*

“The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.”

Everything fits: the four parts of the Greek empire, the arrogance and cruelty of An-ti-o-chus and the desecration of the temple.

This interpretation is an uncanny description of events that happen far in the future, causing some people to speculate that it was written after these historical events actually happened.

If it was, it wasn't written dishonestly, but as a kind of historical fiction; the original readers would have been aware that it was a reflection of God's hand in history.

Others point out that there's no textual or historical support for dating the account hundreds of years after Daniel since he had a unique gift from God to see visions.

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What we have to understand is that God revealed the future to Daniel. Nothing is a surprise to God, and nothing is beyond His control.

Political movements don't surprise Him, and they won't overwhelm His plan.

Wars, disasters, and economic downturns don't catch Him off guard; He's always in control.

No religion, cultural influence, or threat to human decency leave God scrambling to figure out how to respond.

Daniel's vision reveals that God's in control of all events. He has His hand in everything, even events 300 years later than the vision.

We might think that if we could have a vision of the future, like Daniel, it'd set our minds at ease. Yet Daniel had a different response.

Daniel 8:27, "I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding."

Daniel had a glimpse of the future, and it was scary! Even though he could see God in control, Daniel couldn't understand how it would all end.

That's what's frightening as we look at our world today. Where's it all headed? Even if God would give us a vision like Daniel, would that be enough to settle our fears and doubts?

I doubt it. Instead, God has given us a greater vision.

In Matthew 24:1-3, Jesus told his disciples about an event in the future: "Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'"

The disciples couldn't imagine anything more disastrous than the temple being leveled. If that happened, that would mean that everything Jewish was gone: government, religion, even culture.

Certainly, that would be the end of the age, then the Messiah would return to mop up the mess.

However, that's not what Jesus was talking about; the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. never to be rebuilt.

Even the famous Wailing Wall in Jerusalem consists only of foundation stones; the rest is gone. It was a traumatic event in the history of Judaism.

Yet the destruction of the temple fit into God's plan. Christianity was no longer centered around the temple in Jerusalem, but the temple of the church universal, as Paul described in his epistle to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:19-22, "You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

The "*temple*," the church of all nations and races, spread across the entire world. The destruction of the temple wasn't the end of life on earth.

Then, when Jesus' disciples asked to know the details about the end, He warned them to be careful of those who would try to deceive them.

Matthew 24:4-9, "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.... you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."

Not too encouraging! Natural disasters, wars, frauds, deceivers, false religions leading people astray, persecution, and hatred of Christians.

Yet we shouldn't be discouraged. After some instructions about how to respond to the events of 70 A.D., Jesus jumped to the end of the story:

Matthew 24:29-31, "Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

The future might be rough, but the end is glorious!

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Conclusion

We don't always know how to make sense of history, and we don't always see how the events of history fit into God's plan, but we don't need to know those things.

What we need to know is that, even if we are confused and frustrated, God's plan and purpose will not be frustrated. Nothing is a surprise to him.

Nothing is spinning out of control. No person, power or movement is taking over God's plan and purpose. Someday, we'll see how it all works out.

Even Daniel warns us about bad times, yet he gives us hope, too.

Daniel 8:23, 25, "...a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but NOT BY HIS OWN POWER. ...Yet he will be destroyed, but NOT BY HUMAN POWER."

For now, we live by faith—faith in the One Who overcame even death, to rise victorious and ascend into heaven.

He's the Son of Man, who'll come with power and glory to gather His children into His eternal kingdom.

Jesus Christ, the One who guaranteed the fulfillment of God's plan, gives us a promise in Matthew 24:35, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

When we look at the world, filled with confusion, worry, and fear, we have more than a vision like Daniel had. We have Jesus...crowned with glory and honor, Who'll come at the end with power and glory.

When doubt arises, we just need to look to Jesus, Who took the key role in God's plan of redemption and will bring it to the glorious end that God has already determined.

When we feel powerless to the events of history, we find our peace in that God's plan makes all things right.