

Dramatic Preview: *Preparing for a Ramp up of Evil* - Part 1 Daniel 8

"....seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now."

Introduction: There are two types of people in this world: *those who want to know the end of the story/movie/book while they are reading, and those who want to find out in a normal sequence.* Some of us have marriages that are divided by these two approaches, and the Bakker home is no exception. Erin's husband is notorious for checking the end of the series we might be watching as a family, especially when we would watch something like "Survivor". My proud dad moment was when my youngest blurted out the end of "When Calls the Heart", a show we are in the midst of watching (pray for me), much to the chagrin of my other three girls.

When we know the ending of the story, we can relax in the midst of building tension. Not only this, but there is a whole industry of creating **previews** for upcoming movies, shows, or events. I will watch a two minute preview to determine if that movie is worth devoting another 2 hours, or at least knowing the general gist of its contents. We can all admit that often the best parts of a movie are captured in a 2 minute preview, leaving us deflated when we actually are hoping for more in the whole. **Previews** are to give us a sneak peak, a glimpse of what is to come without giving everything away. The best previews are those that grab your interest, get you to watch, but leave the best parts in the actual movie.

As we approach **Daniel 8**, we get a *layered preview of future events and people*. We remember that in chapter 7, we were introduced to a **little horn** that would be known as *Antichrist*, one who would become powerful, would wear out the saints, would speak blasphemy against God and arrogance toward people, would have dominion and power on the earth, would receive worship unto himself, and would seem invincible in the moment. But we also saw that his demise would come when God (the Ancient of Days) puts him to death based on what we written in the book, and that Jesus (the Son of Man) was given a Kingdom, the earth itself. ***Evil would have its time, but it would not win out in the end.***

When you first read Daniel 8 in your devotions, you quickly think about switching to the Psalms or Proverbs, or any other book that makes some sense! Rams, goats, horns, visions, angels...sounds like the template for a weird sci-fi story, but not one that I can apply for my life on a Tuesday. But as we dig in, we realize not only **God's faithfulness and power, but also His graciousness to let us know the future, preparing us for what is to come.** So in the spirit of previews, let's layout what chapter 8 is about, and then we'll spend time walking through it to see how God laid it out to Daniel:

Similarly to chapter 7, the vision Daniel receives is broken down to **2 phases: 1)** the actual vision of what he saw (vv3-14) and the **2)** the interpretation of the vision itself (vv. 15-27). This allows us to move from *guessing to its meaning* to knowing without shadow of a doubt what this vision was all about. **All of this vision for Daniel was future**(it would be fulfilled in the coming 400 years after his life), but for us, the events are all in the past. Because of this, we actually know the **names of the individuals prophesied about, even before they were born.** The vision was simple (but weird): a **ram** with two uneven horns romped through the west, north, and south of the world, and no one could stand in its way (easy way to remember: *the exact opposite power of the LA Rams*). But then a **male goat** with a **uni-horn** charged at the ram, and broke the two horns off in a swift fury and power unknown before. Then the single horn was broken and out of it came 4 horns, out of which a **little horn came out and was great in the south, east, and the glorious land** (Israel). His time of evil reign would be for 2300 days, or just over 6 years.

What did all of this mean or represent? The angel Gabriel, the first time an angel was named in Scripture, gave Daniel the interpretation. Look at verse 20, *"As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia, and the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king."* We know exactly who is represented. The Ram was the kingdom of Media and Persia, conquered by the swift might of **Alexander the Great**, a singular ruler who believed he could conquer the world by his own power, but upon his unexpected death, gave way to 4 generals or kings, of which came a leader/ruler by the name of **Antiochus IV, who gave himself the name "Epiphanes"**, which means "God made manifest". It was these two leaders that **pictured the future Antichrist**, a type of what is to come, a preview in kind, world power and heinous evil that will only pale in comparison to what will happen in future to come, but will give an accurate view of what to expect. So Alexander and Antiochus are pictures of **anti-Christ's**, those who postured themselves as sovereign kings, but met their demise and will one day bow their knee to Jesus Christ, the true king and ruler of the world.

A Regular Setting for an Extraordinary Vision (1-2)

"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. And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai channel."

There are several important observations to make about this vision Daniel saw:

- 1) **The timing** - Again, the book of Daniel is not laid out in chronological order. In chapter 7, Daniel had a dream in the first year of Belshazzar, and now he had a *vision* (he was awake during this one - the difference between being under general anesthesia and local) in the **3rd year of Belshazzar**. This means it happened in **550/51 B.C.**, or **12 years before the fall of Babylon**. This means that this happened 12 years *before* the events of Daniel 5 and the handwriting on the wall. Babylon was still strong (ish), Median and Persia were up and coming but not a big threat yet, and Daniel was still working in Babylon's government.
- 2) **The place** - In the vision, Daniel found himself in **Susa standing by the Ulai canal**. Really strange. Susa was located 220 miles east of Babylon and 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf. At the time, it was the capital of Elam, but later would become a winter residence of Persian kings, and later (521 B.C) became the administrative capital of the empire by Darius I, where he built a beautiful palace. Both Esther (Esth 1:2) and Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1, 2:1) lived in Susa. The point is, Daniel most likely DID NOT get transported physically to Susa, but saw himself in a vision as if he were there, seeing a significant future for a city that was yet to see greatness. This is similar to what the prophet Ezekiel experienced in a vision of the land of Israel (Ezek. 8:1-3)
- 3) **The awe** - Perhaps this is a skinny point, but I believe a significant one. We often view Daniel as a larger than life individual, who experienced amazing events and grace from God, but we need to remember he was a **normal, regular man**. This vision caused him once again to be frightened (v. 17) to fall on his face, and left him sick for many days (v. 27). In verse 1, the language of him receiving the vision was, "a vision appeared to me, I, Daniel." This was not a redundancy of pride but of awe. "It suggests that the old prophet felt honored to receive this revelation from the Lord."¹ Daniel was in awe and honored that **he, an insignificant man, would receive this knowledge from God**. *When was the last*

¹ Steven R. Miller, "Daniel: *The New American Commentary*", p. 220.

time you felt that level of awe and honor for being able to understand the revelation of God? God communicates to us in both **general and special revelation**, both in nature as we see His handiwork, creativity, order, and power in observing the universe itself, and in a special way in His Word. He gives us all we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3) through the knowledge of Him, understanding His promises and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was able to rejoice in the testimony of a dear sister in Christ a couple of weeks ago and who we may hear soon, that though she has read the Bible for years, has more recently began to **understand the Bible for the first time!** When we are saved, we receive the Spirit of God who guides us in truth and conviction of sin, but we also get the **mind of Christ** (1 Cor. 2:16) which allows us to understand this revealed word. Much like Peter when he recognized Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:17), to which Jesus said, "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

Remember, Daniel was to "seal up" what he saw (Dan. 8:26), since it pertained to many days away from when he lived. This did not mean keep it secret, but to **preserve it for future generations**. What we have been given is not only for us, but for those who come after. These are things we should ALL know, and gift them to our children, both physical and spiritual kids, in knowledge and understanding. In other words, **NONE OF US WHO KNOW CHRIST SHOULD BE SLACK IN STRIVING TO UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS**. They are a gift from God to be understood and lived.

4) **The language** - The book of Daniel is written in **2 languages**, and it divides two major sections. Daniel wrote in Aramaic from Chapter 2:4 through the end of chapter 7. Aramaic was the "universal" language of the time, signaling an application to all people. But the rest of Daniel (and chapter 1) is written in **Hebrew**, with the emphasis on the Jewish people, with implication to everyone else. Chapter 7 we see God set up a universal kingdom in Christ for all people, not just God's people of Israel. But in 8-12, the main focus is on God's chosen people and their future. Last week we said we are currently living in a **times of the Gentiles**, a time when God's people are not living in their own land with a king ruling over them. Some will say this will never happen and that God has transferred His promises to the church, but we believe that though everyone comes to salvation through Christ alone, God will fulfill His promises and covenant to Israel in the future. Let's do a "quick" walk through of Biblical history and see how this plays out:

- God calls **Abraham** (Gen.12) and promises Him a *people, land, and blessing* would come from him. Isaac his son had **Jacob**, and Jacob was re-named Israel, having 12 sons, the last 2 being **Joseph and Benjamin**. This whole clan moved to Egypt under famine where Joseph had raised the ranks. God blessed this clan, but because of their rising power, were put under slavery for 400 years
- God raised up **Moses** (Exodus 2) to lead the people out of Egypt to the cusp of the Promised Land. After wandering for 40 years, **Joshua** led the people into the conquest of Canaan, where the people received vineyards they did not plant and cities they did not build. However, this led to a **cycle of sin and redemption** during the time of the Judges - Israel would be disobedient/forgetful, God would raise up an oppressor (like Midian) and then bring an liberator (like Gideon). This was the rhythm for nearly 200 years.
- After this, Israel cried out for a **king** (1 Kings 8) even though God was their king. They wanted to be like every other nation (always the start of a downfall). So God gave them a king in **Saul**, who looked the part but couldn't fit the shoes. He gave way to **David and Solomon**, an era called the **united monarchy**, a 100 year rule where God's name was made famous and Israel's strength and

worship was at its zenith (about 1025 - 925 B.C.). But like all things, this strength did not last as compromise and sin took root, leading to the **Divided Monarchy**.

- Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was young and arrogant, and led to a split in the mighty kingdom (1 Kings 12). 10 tribes to the North unified as **Israel**, setting up their own place of worship and king. After every king was wicked, God gave the North to the hands of **Assyria in 722 B.C.**, and they introduced intermarriage, false religion, and created what was known as **Samaritans**. The Southern kingdom experienced only marginally more success, and after 20 kings of which 6 were righteous, God rose up **Babylon in 605 B.C.** to begin the demolition of Judah, including Jerusalem. We saw in the book of Daniel that by **586 B.C.**, the whole of the nation was left in shambles. This ushered in the "**Time of the Gentiles**", as Israel to this day, have not experienced the type of strength and purity of the United Monarchy.
- After 70 years of captivity, God allowed Israel to return to the land under the decree of Cyrus, king of Medo-Persia (Ezra 1:1). The people returned, the Temple was rebuilt, the wall was finished. But it **paled in comparison**. They were not an independent nation but had to submit to whoever was ruling (including Greece and Rome). God used these rulers to pave the way for Jesus' first coming (common language, universal travel, Pax Romana, etc), but it leaves an open end of when Jesus will return and **restore a kingdom in the land of Israel, a throne in Jerusalem, and a repenting people who worship their God through their Messiah**. Daniel helps us fill in these blanks, not only in the **inter-testamental period, but in the conclusion of the time of the Gentiles**.

The Rise and Power of the Uni-Horn (8:3-8; 19-22)

Next week we'll focus on the little horn that arose out of the four horns, but this morning we will finish by looking at the **goat with a singular, conspicuous horn between his eyes**.

1) **The Power of Medo-Persia** - We've already seen this nation in chapter 2 (chest and arms of silver) and chapter 7 (bear with 3 ribs in its mouth). Now God gave another vivid illustration of this formidable world power. Notice that in verse 3 it states that the ram had 2 horns, one larger than the other, and the larger one came up last. This tells exactly how this kingdom was formed. Media was already a major force in the world, but **Cyrus**, who ruled the smaller Persia, succeeded in gaining control of the powerful Media to the North (550 B.C), and thus made Persia more important of the 2 states. They conquered the most land of any nation up until this point in history, subduing Babylon and Syria to the West, Armenia to the North, and Egypt in the South.

2. **The Fury of Alexander the Great** - Horns represented power and authority, and the singular horn of the goat represented the white hot power of Alexander. He was represented by a leopard with four wings in chapter 7, an apt description of his swift military might. Alexander's father, Philip of Macedon, was a powerful man who brought Greece and Macedonia together. He was planning to move East and fight Medo-Persian, but before he could move forward, he was murdered. Alexander, educated under Aristotle, was only twenty years old in **336 B.C** when he succeeded his father (what were you doing when you were 20!) Alexander had 35,000 troops, crossed the Hellespont, left Greece, took up arms against Medo-Persia, and never returned to his home. History records that though they were often outnumbered, his troops fought with a fervor and abnormal strength, devastating their enemies. Within 3 years, Alexander gained victories at the Battle of Granicus, Issus (333 B.C), Arbela (331), conquering the entire Near East. He was a military genius, who fought

angry, determined to avenge the earlier assaults on his homeland, and verse 7 graphically portrays his utter demolition of the Persian armies. In 10 years he conquered the world, but died in a drunken stupor at 33 years old. The kingdom was divided between his 4 generals (v. 8) but none of these possessed the power he displayed (v. 22). For 22 years afterward, **Cassander** in the west, **Lysimachus** in the north, **Seleucus** in the east, and **Ptolemy** in the south tried to control their perspective areas, but these would give way to another horn, a little one, in the person of **Antiochus IV**, one we'll look at next week.

What do we take away from this, other than the fact that God gave Daniel a specific reality of the future. Alexander set himself up as a godlike figure, one who had the most might and power of anyone in the world. In a similar way, the coming Antichrist will exude this kind of power, "wearing out the saints of the most high" (Dan. 7:25). Though Alexander was Great, and providentially given this kind of dominion by God Himself, he does not hold a candle to the true Savior and Christ, Jesus our Lord.

I appreciate the words of **Charles Ross Weede**, who compared Alexander with our Lord. Listen to how he frames these two:

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three. / One lived and died for self, one died for you and me. / The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross. / One's life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss. / One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone; / One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own. / One won the world in life and lost it all in death. / The other lost His life to win the whole world's faith. / Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three. / One died in Babylon; and one at Calvary.

"One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave; / One conquered every tongue; the other every grave. / The one made himself god; the other made Himself less. / The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless. / When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords; / But Jesus died to live forever Lord of Lords. / Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three. / The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.

"One built a throne on blood; the other built on love, / The one was born of earth; the other from above; / One won all this earth, to lose all earth and heaven. / The other gave up all, that all to Him be given." / And then this final statement: "The Greek forever died; the Jew forever" - what? - "lives." Jesus and Alexander died at 33. Charles Ross Weede points to the fact that there is no comparison.²

A preview of what is to come, but also a glimpse of the end. Jesus will come on a white horse and will make war and judge in righteousness. His eyes are like a flame of fire and out of mouth will come a sharp sword to strike down the nations and will rule with a rod of iron. He will capture the beast and the false prophet and cast them into the lake of fire and slay all the rest that are opposed to Him (Rev. 19:11-21). Though the final Antichrist will have military might like Alexander, they are miniscule compared to our mighty Savior.

² Taken from John MacArthurs sermon on Daniel 8:3-9, gty.org, April 20, 1980.