Daniel’s Second Vision: Hope for the Painful Times of Life

Daniel 8

**Introduction**

 This morning our text of study will be the entirety of chapter 8 of Daniel. In this chapter Daniel is recording the second vision that was given to him by God. The purpose of these visions was to prove God’s people with important information regarding what would happen in the future. As we saw in the first vision in chapter 7, Daniel is laying the foundation for the kingdoms that would appear on the earth after Babylon showing that God is sovereign over all things that take place on the earth. Each kingdom that has existed had a purpose which was to bring about the perfect will of God. Today’s message will include some history because we need to know who the vision is referring to as well as insights into the future kingdoms that would take power after the life of Daniel.

**Setting and Context (vv. 1-2, 27)**

Please refer to Daniel chapter 8 which has been printed for you in the bulletin. As we begin looking at verses 1-2 we will be given the setting as well as the context for the passage. Daniel records that he received this vision in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar who was the last king to rule over the kingdom of Babylon. He also tells us that this was the second vision that he had because it followed the vision discussed in chapter 7.

Moving on to verse 2 we are told that Daniel says that in the vision he was in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam. If you look at the screen with me you will see a map of this part of the world during the life of Daniel. What we need to do is look at where this is taking place. This map shows the provinces that existed in the Median Empire during the life of Daniel. Along the west side of the map, we see Mesopotamia and Babylonia, which is where the events of the book of Daniel take place. The city of Babylon has a star because it was the capital city of the kingdom. Daniel is in Susa, which is a province of the Median Empire. We see it marked also with a star. If we look closely, we see that a river flows through the city of Susa. This is the Ulai Canal that Daniel mentions in verse 2. Therefore, everything that Daniel will observe in this vision will be taking place in Media. Another note we need to make before moving on is that Susa will become the eventual capital city of the Persian Empire after it defeats Babylon as well as Media. The events in the book of Esther take place there. Also, when Nehemiah leaves from Persia to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, he departs from Susa.

Before we begin to look at the vision, we need to look at the end. Daniel shares that he is shocked and made sick by what he will experience in this vision. It is so alarming and he was unable to understand what it meant. Even though there are times in our lives when things happen to us that we do not understand, we can rest assured that God will bring to us the knowledge of what is happening and through the power of His Holy Spirit He will make it known to us.

**The Ram (vv. 3-4, 20)**

 Now we will begin looking specifically at the vision Daniel has. The first object he sees is a Ram standing in front of the canal. The ram has two horns, but these horns are not identical. One of the horns was longer than the other with the longer one appearing after the shorter one. After the ram appeared it began ramming into everything to the west, north and south. Everything that it rammed into was destroyed because nothing could stand up to it. This kept happening until the ram had defeated everything is each direction resulting in it having great power over the other regions of the world.

 Now what we need to do is jump to verse 20 where the messenger Gabriel is going to provide a description to Daniel of who the ram represents. Before we get to the explanation, it is first important to mention a couple of facts regarding Gabriel. When looking through the pages of the Old Testament we see that God sends messengers (they are also referred to as angels) to His people. Their purpose is to bring the Word of God to the people and instruct them regarding the work that God was calling them to do. Once such example is when the three visitors come to see Abraham in Genesis 18. These three angels, one who was most likely a physical appearance of Jesus Christ, come to Abraham to tell him regarding the birth of Isaac as well as the judgment against Sodom. In that passage the messengers are not given names, and we do not see any messenger of God being given a name until Gabriel in the book of Daniel. Not only do we see the name Gabriel in Daniel, but he is also mentioned later as being the messenger who brings the news of Christ’s conception and birth to Mary. So, Gabriel is one of the angelic beings who serves as a messenger of God in Scripture.

 Gabriel explains to Daniel that the ram depicts the kingdoms of Media and Persia. The reason why the second horn to appear is longer than the first one is because the kingdom of Persia will defeat Media and take over all of its land. These horns will defeat all of the other kingdoms around them and will dominate the world for a set period of time. Daniel is being shown that after the defeat of Babylon both Media and Persia will have a time of conquest and dominion over the other nations of the world. This domination will only remain in effect for a time, however, and then they will be defeated as well.

**The Goat (vv. 5-8, 21-22)**

 The vision next shows Daniel a goat coming from the west. The goat did not touch the ground at all having a horn right in the middle of its eyes. It would rush towards the ram and then totally destroy it. The ram had no chance of stopping the goat because it had nobody to come to its aid. Finally, the goat became powerful but then the horn was destroyed being replaced by four other horns. This vision is a depiction of the Greek Empire of the future, which would dominate the world.

 As we skip down to verses 21-22 Gabriel then tells Daniel what all of this represents. The goat is the Greek Empire and the horn between the eyes is Alexander the Great who was the greatest military leader of his day. After sweeping across the earth (without touching the ground) Alexander defeated all of the other kingdoms of that time. The goat charging and crushing the two horns tells us that the Greeks will defeat the kingdoms of Media and Persia. Now, the horn being broken is when Alexander died at the age at a young age. After his death his kingdom was divided among four of his generals. Once again, I am going to ask you to look at the map provided showing the four regions that were taken over by those generals. Their names were Ptolemy, Cassander, Lysimachus and Seleucus. These names are important because they will show us the kingdoms that will come to power in the future.

**The Little Horn (vv. 9-14, 23-26)**

I would like for you to focus on the region known as Seleucus. This region is what was previously controlled by Persia and then what will be known as Syria. It is from this region that a descendant will arise whose name is Antiochus Epiphanes IV. This is a Seleucid King who would eventually become extremely powerful and would invade Judea. He is the rather small horn that grows exceedingly great towards the south, the east and the Beautiful Land, which is the Promised Land. This king will become so powerful that his arrogance and wickedness will become extremely great as well. Let us look specifically at the details Daniel provides for us in verses 9-14.

 In verse 10 this kingdom grew up to the heavenly lights and threw down to earth some of the stars of heaven trampling them. This is telling us that Antiochus will take over the city of Jerusalem and as one of the stars in the heaven will be trampled down once it has been invaded. What he does after he invades Jerusalem in 168 BC is now described for us in verses 11-12. He exalts himself to be equal to the Commander of the army (God) and removes sacrifices from Him and the overthrows the sanctuary. When Antiochus invaded Jerusalem he desecrated the temple. He did not allow the people to practice their religious festivals, outlawed the practice of circumcision, brought an idol of Zeus into the temple and then slaughtered a pig on the alter in the temple. All of these actions were so detestable to the people that it resulted in the Maccabean Revolt, which is celebrated today with the festival of Hanukkah. God allows all of this to take place because of the sin of the people and their refusal to worship Him as they promised in the days of Moses. This is the wrath of God being poured out on His people.

 As we conclude the passage regarding Antiochus, a voice speaks asking how long this suffering and persecution were going to last. The answer is provided in verse 14. This will last for 2300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary would be restored. As we have seen before in the previous vision, the judgment of God will last for a time, but then He promises restoration to the nation. It turns out that from the time that Antiochus invaded Jerusalem, killed the high priest to when it was restored was almost six years. Therefore, 2300 evenings and mornings represents days. 2300/365= 6.3. This shows us that God has ordained the time of judgment for the nation, but also tells them that He will restore it at the appointed time.

 Now we need to turn our attention to verses 23-26 which gives us more information regarding Antiochus IV. He will destroy everything in his path (v. 24) and be successful enough to be able to do anything that he pleases. He will make himself great and try to place himself above the mighty God of heaven. In verse 25 it is said that he will oppose the Prince of princes meaning that he will set himself up against God Himself. This man will be prideful and very powerful, but as we have already seen before this will lead to his defeat. Daniel records that “But he will be broken without human agency” meaning that God himself will bring him down. Not only do these words refer to Antiochus, but they remind us of the Antichrist figure that will come at the end of the age. He will rise against God and even have the audacity to take arms up against Him. He will be defeated by God, which will usher in the new kingdom ruled by Christ. This passage reminds us of the restoration promised by God after the time of trial.

**Applications**

 So far this morning we have been discussing a lot of details and historical information. What we are now going to do as we wrap up this chapter is look at three ways that we can use this information in our lives today. The first application point, which I know we have discussed several times already in this book, is that in the life of a follower of Christ we should expect to have times of pain and uncertainty. All of us can think back to experiences we have had that have been so awful that they have shocked us or caused us to stop and process it. This should not be a surprise to us because the Word of God takes many opportunities to warn us of such trials and persecution. For example, in **Philippians 1:29** the Apostle Paul informs his readers with these words **“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on His behalf,”.** Paul using the word granted is making the point that we as followers of Christ have the privilege of facing suffering as a part of our testimony of the faith we have in Christ. When we suffer, we need to look upon that as a good thing because it is through that suffering that we bring glory to God our Father. The Prophet Daniel shows in this vision that the people of Gid would be experiencing times of suffering in the future that are the result of sin. However, he also reminds the people that God promises restoration after that suffering has been experienced. This is the hope for those who trust in God, that even though they will suffer for their faith they will be rewarded with a crown of righteousness in the kingdom of heaven.

 Our next point of application is that even though we know that life will have its share of suffering and trials, there is reason to have hope because God has limited the amount of evil that He will permit to take place. We see this evident in the passage we looked at today. Let us revisit verses 13 and 14. The voice asks how long all of these suffering under the oppressive king will last? The messenger says 2300 days and nights. Antiochus would eventually be defeated and then the temple would be restored to the nation. What we learn is that the evil that God permits to take place on this earth is limited by Him and that it will not last any longer than is necessary to fulfill His will. The Apostle Peter in his first epistle shares these words with his readers **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though something strange were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice and be overjoyed” (4:12-13).** The suffering and the ordeals that followers of Christ experience are for testing as well as opportunities to share in the sufferings of Christ so that we may also share in His glory. When God allowed all of the events to take place explained in Daniel’s vision, He was using the pagan kingdoms to bring about His purposes. Also, God does not inflict us with more temptations or trials then we are able to handle. Paul writes these words to the church in Corinth **“No temptation has overtaken you except something common to mankind; and God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it**” **(1 Corinthians 10:13).** These words ring true in the experience of the nation of Israel as they endured the trials during their exile and after they returned to Jerusalem. God tested them, but also provided a way out so that the people were able to endure it.

 Our third, and final, application this morning is that while this life has its trials and suffering there is hope because God has promised restoration. The messenger in today’s passage tells Daniel that after all of the things come to pass God will restore the temple (v. 14). We also can live in the assurance that after all of the trials of this life have passed Jesus Christ will return and take those home with Him who have endured to the end. We need to remember the words of Christ to the Apostle John in **Revelation 21:5** when He says **“Behold, I am making all things new.”** When Christ returns, He will restore all things to the original perfect glory and defeat Satan and his angels. He has already overcome the curse of sin and death with His sacrifice and victory over the grave. In His second coming He will end the curse of Satan forever and establish the new heaven and the new earth where those who have faith in Him will leave eternally. There will be no more tears, pain or death. Everything will be made new.

**Conclusion**

 May we leave here this morning with the blessed assurance that God has a plan for His creation. Even though there will be times of suffering, trial and pain, He will see to it that all who trust in Christ as Savior will be rewarded for their faithfulness. Daniel is sharing with us the events of the future, proving that God knows all things and that we can trust Him to see to it that everything works out for those who place their faith in Him. Amen.