

Daniel: Lord of History

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[0 : 00] of your church Bible. It's quite a big section, so I encourage you to get yourself a Bible. You can follow along. There's a lot of detail in these chapters, and therefore it'll help you keep focused with what it's all about. Before we read chapter 8, just by way of introduction, and you'll notice that Daniel 1 to 6 is slightly different from Daniel chapter 7 through to the end of the book, and from Daniel 7 onwards, this is called apocalyptic literature. It's a bit of a mouthful, but it's a kind of writing that uses all kinds of colours and imagery, sometimes numbers, to tell us two big ideas. First, what's going on in the world, and what God is going to do about it in the future. So it's a kind of writing with lots of imagery and colours to tell us about what is going on in the world now, and what will happen in the future. And this is what the vision is all about. Kirsty is going to come and read for us Daniel chapter 8, verses 1 through to 27.

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 Ule Canal. 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 he charged towards the west and the north and the south.

No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased, and became great. As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. He came towards the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal, and charged at him in great rage. I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him.

The goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power. 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 towards the four winds of heaven.

[3 : 07] Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and towards 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 prince of the host. It took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low.

Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

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, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled and underfoot? He said to me, It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary will be re-consecrated.

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 ule 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 concerned 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 concerned 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 his eyes is the first king. The four horns that replace 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 stern-faced 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 the mighty men and 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.

[6 : 01] 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. I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision. It was beyond understanding.

Thanks very much. Well, let's pray. I think we always need God's help. And in particular, with a vision like this, what does it have to say to us today? Well, let's pray and ask God to help us. Our Father God, we come before you as the one who is Lord of history. Therefore, Lord over our lives and Lord over everything.

We thank you that in your goodness you have given to us your word, written down. We thank you for the book of Daniel.

We thank you for all it contains. And while some of it is complex to our minds, we pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would not just give us intellectual understanding, but an understanding of the heart, whereby it causes us to love you, the Lord of history, to trust you in everything, both today and for the rest of our lives.

[8 : 01] So please help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You have three choices.

Three choices. Number one, you can denounce the Lord Jesus and live. Number two, you can pay a protection tax to save your life but have no rights.

Or number three, you can continue to honour the Lord Jesus and die. Thankfully, that's not a choice we have to make right now.

But it might be. If you're a follower of the Lord Jesus and you live in a country like Iraq or Iran, those will be the choices that are put to you.

You can denounce the Lord Jesus and live. You can pay a protection tax to save your life but have no rights. Or you can continue to honour the Lord Jesus and die.

[9 : 21] This is the reality for many of the world's Christians and with the spread of ISIS that we hear on the news, the growing influence of Sharia law, it will be a reality for many more people, even in Europe.

But this sort of thing shouldn't surprise us because this kind of treatment of Christians is not new. It happened during the life of Daniel as we have seen under the Babylonian and the Persian empires. And in this vision in chapter 8, Daniel tells us that things are going to get a whole lot worse before they get any better.

Things are going to get a whole lot worse before they get better. No wonder Daniel felt sick after what he saw.

Look at verse 27. After his vision, he says, I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days.

[10 : 32] Daniel was completely and utterly wiped out by the vision. The very thought of what was to come made him so weak that he couldn't get out of bed.

But, look at the rest of verse 27. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision.

I was so overwhelmed by it. It was beyond understanding. You see, somehow, Daniel was able to keep on going, living for God in the place where God had called him to, even though he knew things were going to get worse.

Now, you and I mightn't face the same kind of pressure that Daniel did or our fellow brothers and sisters in Iraq had to do. but sometimes, and I know this is true for some of you, going into work or into school or perhaps to your lectures as the only Christian, some days that's really too much.

We feel the pressure of loneliness. we feel the difficulty of being different, of being misunderstood. And sometimes, just simply trying to live for God in a world that is hostile to God can be so difficult and so overwhelming we just don't want to get out of bed.

[12 : 16] Have you ever felt like that? Because I have. You just don't want to face a day. So what is it that Daniel saw that made him so ill but enabled him to get up and to get on with serving God

where he was?

Because if we can get that right it's going to help us living our lives for him. So three things we're going to see from this vision that Daniel saw.

Here's the first thing he sees. A God who knows all of history. Now the book of Daniel is really quite remarkable especially these last few chapters and particularly chapter 8.

Let me show you. Daniel was written around 530 BC. 530 before Christ. But when we read chapter 8 he is actually talking about kings and kingdoms that came into power 300 to 500 years later.

In other words this vision is telling us that God knows all of history. Let me show you. Verse 3 chapter 8. He says I looked up and there before me was a ram with two horns.

[13:46] Down at verse 5. As I was thinking about this about the ram with the two horns suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west.

What's all this farmyard talk about? Well look at the interpretation verse 20. 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 his eyes is the first king and we know now that the first king of the Greek empire was Alexander the Great.

You see in this vision we have such precise detail. The clarity and the accuracy of this vision is incredible.

History tells us and you can look up the books for yourself that after the Babylonian empire came the Persian empire and after the Persian empire came the Greek empire under Alexander the Great.

[15:01] All of that is fact. It's all true. It's undisputed. But God through Daniel was telling him all these things 500 years before they happened.

You see God knows all that will take place before the end of time. God knows what's going to happen next year.

God knows what's going to happen next week. God knows what's going to happen to us this afternoon. Now doesn't that help you to turn the light on in these dark mornings and begin to help you to get up.

Because here we have a God who knows all of history. He knows what empires will rule. He knows what kings will lead. And if God knows that, then God knows what is happening in your life and in my life.

Every single detail. He's not surprised by each new day. He's not overwhelmed by the circumstances that you face into.

[16:23] He knows the whole of your life from the first day till your last day and all the little intricate details in between. God knows all of history and he knows the history of your life.

The second thing that Daniel sees is a God who rules over history. So he not only knows history, he rules all of history.

As Daniel takes in this vision that he sees, all he seems to see is great upheaval and violent conflict. Great upheaval and violent conflict.

Look at verse 4 of chapter 8. He says, I watched the ram as he charged towards the west and the north and the south.

No animal could stand against him and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

[17:35] Now as we've seen, we know that this was the rule of the Medo-Persian empire. For the best part of 250 years, it ruled the world with power and might.

It swallowed up surrounding nations as the Persian empire expanded its borders as it pleased. But that was all soon to be replaced, verse 5.

as I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

This goat with the horn, as we have seen as well, was the empire of Greece, under the rule of Alexander the Great. With his vast armies, he marched with such speed and ferocity, like a tidal wave.

It conquered everyone and everything in its path. Verse 6. He came towards the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage.

[18:46] I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him. The goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and

none could rescue the ram from his power.

When the Greeks came in, they decimated the Persians. But strong and as powerful as the Greek empire was, it had its own internal conflicts.

Look at verse 8. 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 towards the four winds of heaven.

What on earth is all that about? Well, look at verse 22. The interpretation is given. Verse 22.

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.

[20 : 09] Again, history tells us that when Alexander the Great died, the Greek empire was split into four smaller kingdoms, each of which was ruled by a new general or a new king.

And this is what Daniel is telling us, even though he's writing 500 years before it happened. The point is, history is bloody and violent.

There's this continued desire for power and for control. And stuck in the middle of all these wars and squeezed in between all these conflicts are God's people.

People like Daniel. Because Christians are not immune from this chaos. We live in a troubled world. We can't escape it. And if we are not careful, we can begin to panic and think that God has somehow lost control of the world in which we live.

As we look out onto the world today, it's easy to think that nobody rules. Turn on your television and see all the bad news that there is.

[21 : 29] The raging conflicts across Syria and Iraq. The continued battles between Russia and Ukraine. The upheaval that we've seen recently in Burkino Faso.

power continually shifts from one ruling party to another. Recent elections in the US tell us that the Republicans are going to replace the Democrats.

And here at home, the so-called saviors of our economy, Fina Gael, are now bottom of the popularity poll. Because that's the world we live in, a violent upheaval.

there's power battles and power struggles that happen around us all the time. And this is the life we live in. We're stuck in the middle of it all as nations and leaders seek control.

But we are not to panic. We are not to lose hope. The message to Daniel and to us in all of this is that God rules over all of history.

[22 : 38] God takes Daniel into this vision and he shows Daniel what was going to take place into the future to show Daniel that he is in control.

Nations will rise. Kings will fall. But I rule over everyone. I oversee the appointment of every Taoiseach.

I govern the fall of every party. I am the sovereign God who rules. So don't panic.

Now doesn't that help you to turn your light on in the morning and begin to get up? Because here we have a God who rules over all of history.

And if God rules over the affairs of this world then that means he rules over the affairs of your life and my life. That means when you go into work tomorrow and you've got a boss you don't get on with.

[23 : 48] God rules over your boss. When you go to college tomorrow and you're facing into a situation you don't want to God rules over that.

He rules over the decisions that come against you. He rules over the troubles that you experience. He rules over the health problems that come to you. He rules over everything that you face.

God does not promise life is going to be easy for the Christian. In fact he was telling Daniel things are going to get a whole lot more tough before they get better.

But when we face into difficulties God is saying this don't panic don't panic God rules all of history. So God knows all of history God rules all of history and third Daniel sees a God who ends all of history.

[25 : 03] What's clear from Daniel's vision is that the world is going to get a lot more worse before it does get any better. Look back to what he has seen in the vision so far.

We had the ram didn't we in verse three which represented the Persian empire. Then in verse five came the goat which was the Greek empire that overtook the Persian empire.

And when Alexander the Great died that first great leader of the Greek empire the Greek empire was then split into four smaller kingdoms. Look at verse nine.

Out of one of them so out of one of these smaller four kingdoms came another horn another leader which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and towards the beautiful land. The beautiful land was the land of God's people of Israel. So who is this new leader that's going to arise from one of these smaller kingdoms?

[26 : 14] Well before we find out who he is let's see what he does. He will do two things. The first thing he will crush the people of God.

Verse 10 he will crush the people of God. Look at verse 10. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens and it threw some of the starry hosts down to the earth.

That's a reference there to God's people. He threw the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. This leader who was to come would inflict great pain and kill the people of God.

But that's not all he would do. He would also replace the worship of God. Look at verse 11. God it set itself up to be as great as the prince of the host.

In other words he saw himself as God. It took away the daily sacrifice from him. Took away the worship of God and the place of his sanctuary was brought low.

[27 : 36] He was going to crush the people of God and replace the worship of God. Verse 13. Then I heard a holy one speaking and another holy one said to me how long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled?

How long are God's people going to have to suffer under this ruler until it's all over? How long are they going to have to live with this terrible suffering?

Verse 14. He said to me it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.

In other words this new leader that's going to come will rule for a set number of days known only by God but then his end will come.

you're going to have to live through it but then the end will come. So who is this leader?

[28 : 46] We've seen what he will do but who is he? Well history records for us in Greek and again you can go and check out your history books for this history records for us a Greek leader that came from this kingdom in the south one of these smaller kingdoms his name was Antiochus he ruled for about ten years from 175 to 164 BC and here's what we know about him on the coins he had his own head his own face printed on it with the title epiphanies which means God's representative on earth in other words he took the place of God he sought to replace anything to do with God he set himself up as being greater than the prince of the host that we read about listen to what was recorded during the time of his rule this comes from a secular historian and this is what was recorded he commanded that this should happen to

God's people he said the observance of all Jewish that's ordinances all the things all the worship of God's people was prohibited on pain of death in every town in Judea sacrifice was to be offered to the heathen gods overseers were sent everywhere to see that the royal command was carried out where the people did not comply willingly they were obliged to do so by force once a month a check was made and whoever was found with a scroll of the Torah or that is if they had a part of scripture in their homes they were put to death what Daniel saw in his vision all those years before became true Antiochus crushed God's people and he replaced the worship of God it's recorded that over a period of three days up to 80,000 of God's people were either killed or sold into slavery what Daniel saw became a reality no wonder he felt so ill that he couldn't get out of bed with what was to come look at verse 23 in the latter part of the reign here it's talking about the Greek empire and those four smaller kingdoms in the latter part of their reign when rebels have become completely wicked a stern faced king that was Antiochus a master of intrigue will arise he will become very strong but not by his own power he will cause astounding devastation and he will succeed in whatever he does he will destroy the mighty men and the holy people that's God's people he will cause deceit to prosper and he will consider himself superior when they that's

God's people feel secure he will destroy many and take his stand against the prince of princes he will take his stand against God it was a horrific time in history for God's people but why do we have in chapter 8 why have we got 500 years of horrible history all explained to us here why has Daniel been given a glimpse into the future of how difficult and terrible it will be well I think it's here to remind us as it would remind Daniel that we live in a world where nations leaders and their laws are continually in opposition to God and God's people it's here to remind us that when we wake up in the morning and you go to work or you go to college or you go out with your friends we go into a place that has replaced

God with the worship of other things and other people we go into a world that's hostile because the world has and it always will be a difficult place to live as a Christian we will to some degree or another face hostility the line that's in that song that says follow Jesus and all your problems will disappear it's really not true become a Christian and you will have a lot of problems because we live in a hostile world so how can I like Daniel knowing the trouble that we face get up every single day and go to my place of work go to my college socialize with my friends how can I face into that knowing that things are not only tough but that things are going to get worse and more difficult well look at verse 25 let's read verse 25 again he will cause deceit to prosper he will consider himself superior when they feel secure he will destroy many and take a stand against the prince of princes yet he will be destroyed but not by human power there's our hope contained in that little sentence he will be destroyed but not by human power

[35 : 03] Daniel's vision is telling us that one day just as there would be an end to the hostility of Antiochus there will be an end to all hostility of God's people and that end will come not by human power not by the might of some leader or some nation or some church or some anybody but by God's power and through his son the Lord Jesus God will one day end all of history listen to the words of Jesus and what he promised about the end no need to look them up they come from Mark 13 but I want us to listen to these words as we close these are the words of Jesus spoken to his followers and they're words that continue to speak to us today listen to

Jesus speak to our lives when you hear of wars and rumors of wars do not be alarmed such things must happen but the end is still to come nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom you must be on your guard you must be on your guard you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues in other words you will face hostility you will face trouble in life on account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them and the gospel must first be preached to all nations we continue to preach the gospel in the midst of great hostility so be on your guard

I have told you everything ahead of time but in those days following that distress following all the hostilities hostility and struggle will one day be gathered up by the risen Lord Jesus and will be brought into his eternal kingdom be on your guard do not be afraid I am with you says the Lord and until the end comes the gospel must be preached to see many more people come to faith in Christ let's pray together Father we cannot even get our heads around one single day of our life and all that happens to us from the moment we wake to the moment that we sleep but here before us in your word we have history laid out before us with such precision and such detail and we stand back amazed at the

Lord of history the one who knows the beginning to the end the one who rules over every event and every detail and the one who will one day come again and end history as we know it Father help us to be on our guard help us when we waken tomorrow morning and we're afraid of what we will face in the coming week anxious of the things that are going to happen help us to look afresh to the Lord of history to get up to go to work to go to college to go out with our friends in confidence that our God reigns and rules and that our life with him is completely in his hands

[41 : 04] Father would you please give to your people to us here today opportunity to share the good news of Jesus the Lord of history we pray that yet many people might be a part of that great number that you gather to yourself on the last day help us we praise you we worship you for you are great amen we are going to sing a great song a great hymn that reminds us that our future is secure heroes and importante we can wait