

Daniel 8

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[0 : 00] 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 Canal. And I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal.

It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward.

No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great. And as I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground.

And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal. And he ran at him in his powerful wrath.

[1 : 06] I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him.

And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the goat became exceedingly great. But when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great even to the host of heaven.

And some of the host and some of the stars, it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown.

And a host will be given over to it with the regular burnt offering because of the transgression. And it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking.

[2 : 16] And another holy one said to the one who spoke, For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?

And he said to me, For twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state. When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it.

And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.

So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, Understand, O son of man, that this vision is for the time of the end.

And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up. He said, Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end.

[3 : 29] 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.

As for the horn that was broken, in a place of which four others rose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise.

His power shall be great, but not by his own power. And he shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints.

By his cunning, he shall make deceit prosper under his hand. And in his own mind, he shall become great. Without warning, he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the prince of

princes.

And he shall be broken, but by no human hand. The vision of the evenings and of the mornings that has been told is true. But seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now.

[4 : 40] And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks. Well, you don't always have to get on an airplane, do you, to travel to exotic places.

Sometimes all it takes is coming to Holy Trinity Church on a Sunday when we've got this reading out of the box in a book like Daniel.

The first two verses of the text give us all the words of transport we need. Take a look. 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 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 Canal. Now, suddenly, almost by way of a magic carpet ride, we are reading and high overhead a land mass.

[6 : 01] Today we would recognize it as modern-day Iran. Our descent takes us over the province of Elam, where in the distance, some 200 miles now east of Babylon, where Daniel had been living, is the citadel of Susa.

And it all comes into view. And then, before looking twice, it's almost as if we're set down by the words in the text at the place of destination. We're standing right alongside a canal on the very spot that Daniel was whisked away to by a vision nearly three millennia ago.

Yes, for the second time in as many chapters, Daniel has seen a vision. And with his words, we make the visit with him. Visions like this and the dreams that we saw last week in chapter 7 are part and parcel of a literature that goes by the name Apocalypse.

It's apocalyptic literature. It's a pulling back of a curtain and a revealing of great calamitous ends in which God's own kingdom comes.

Leland Ryken, professor of English literature, described this kind of literature with these words.

Dream and not narrative is the model that visionary literature in the Bible follows.

[7 : 41] Of what does a dream consist? Momentary pictures. Fleeting impressions. Characters and scenes that play their part and then drop out of sight.

Abrupt jumps from one action to another. And Daniel 8 is certainly all of that and then some. The momentary pictures.

You're confronted with animals that have multiplied horns. Verses 1-14. As well as an angelic appearance and an interpretation which was meant to give understanding but gave none of it.

Verses 15-26. The prophet is left dazed, even more confused than he was when it all began.

Fortunately for us though, our journey, and when it's finished in this chapter, is done, we're going to be in better shape than was Daniel.

Your jet lag won't be as severe. The reason is simple. From a historical standpoint, we have every advantage over the character in the text.

[8 : 56] For Daniel, in the text, this unexpected trip to the province of Elam could never have been understood. For you though, standing where you do, understanding is close at hand.

The first momentary picture, to use Rikens' phrase, verse 3, a ram, standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns and both horns were high.

But one was higher than the other and the higher one came up last. Can you envision him? This ram that represents in the latter half of the chapter a world power standing alongside the bank.

Notice how he's described. He's described in a way where it's the horn and the horns that leave the biggest impression. I did a little looking this week and the horns of rams, like the horns of other animals, are made of keratin, this fibrous protein.

It's the stuff that gives you the toughness in your own fingernails, toenails. For this kind of beast, the horns began growing at birth.

[10 : 19] They enlarged all the way into old age. At a literary level, the horn is nearly always emblematic of one's power or strength.

So much earlier in the biblical record, there are instances of Hannah exalting God for raising the horn of her own salvation.

David, who lifts a song to God for elevating his own horn or power above all other imposters.

So verse 4 gives you a sense of the extent of that horn or power that was given to this purportedly future world ruler. It says, I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him. There was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great. And so as you read it, you're meant to understand that this power has a will to make conquest in all directions, on all fronts, at all times.

[11 : 33] When Daniel saw it, he stood still, silent. The text says he was considering it. And who among us wouldn't do the same?

Immediately, however, the first impression shows itself to be fleeting. Or as Riken put it, the character played its part and then dropped out of sight. To put it more bluntly, the strong ram was overrun and gored, gored to death by a goat that made a sudden appearance, galloping at a speed that made it appear as if his feet never actually hit the ground.

A hydroplaning goat. Not over water, but over the plains. I mean, if you just place your eyes on the text of five through eight, it reminds me of a linebacker in full dress.

The kind that back in the mid-70s would have worn a white foam neck collar. Running down the line moving horizontally from hash mark to hash mark, overrunning a runner who never saw him coming.

Growing up, I was quite fortunate. In the summer months, my mom and dad would take us on these extended camping trips. And invariably, my dad wanted us to head west and to the mountains.

[13 : 15] Any number of mountain ranges. I feel like I've been in a mall between here and California. To give you a sense of how high up into the mountains we would go, my dad used to say that if the campground had flushed toilets, we were still too low.

You remember the old KOA maps that charted out dot by dot what a campground might have. And if there was a black dot under running water, he wasn't up for it.

Higher up, further in. He got away from everybody and everything. I'll always remember the morning we came up on a herd of mountain goats.

We didn't have the kind of equipment we would have had today to capture it, but we caught them unaware. Our scent was hidden from them by being upwind and we were just on the other side of a ridge and they didn't know we were there and we didn't know they were there until we were upon them.

Literally 30 feet away from them. I've got pictures to prove it. The white goats are majestic creatures.

[14 : 40] Horns solid and erect ready to take ground and defend any turf taken. On the day Daniel got his own glimpse of the goat, the great horn was broken off and growing back in its place was a scurr, a kind of deformed mutation as it were.

A horn that became four horns, the last of which rising up greater than all the rest. To see that in a vision is to make the heart stand still.

to be 30 feet away upwind, well you're hoping his gaze doesn't catch yours. We wait, we watch, and what once was is no more and what is to come will soon be made known for just as Reichen told us, the scene abruptly jumps from one action to another.

another. You move into 9 to 14 and with it you come to the close and the emphasis of the vision.

Those verses tell you that out of one of the four horns came another.

It was little at first, but due to some unknown source, keratin, miracle grow, as it were. It surpassed all the rest.

[16 : 25] In other words, it gives us a kingdom that would use its power, according to the text, in verses 10 and 11, to set its sights on two destinations. It rose to the heavens to scatter the stars of the host of the creator God, this kind of defiant rise, as well as this disdainful move upon Israel, upon what the text calls the glorious land, which for Daniel was home.

It's a ruler, in a sense, that commences star wars against the divine. It appears for a time to even be equal to the prince of heaven.

that's some strength. And it does battle against him by waging war, not only against his host, but his promised ones who dwelt in the glorious land.

Their temple is overrun. Their daily sacrifices are halted. And as a result, truth as they know it is, verse 12, thrown down to the ground.

The terrifying vision concludes with an emphasis on duration. How long will this one be given this kind of rain? How long will the sanctuary of God be spoiled by an abomination that makes

desolate?

[18 : 04] Well, it will not be restored, the text says, for 2,300 evenings and mornings. It could refer to the evening and morning sacrifices whereby we would read it a couple of days.

It could refer to 2,300 on its own. It could signify a general length of time that will come to conclusion. But in the twinkling of an eye, Daniel and we who journeyed with him are transported home.

He goes back to Babylon. You come back to Chicago. He stares at the ceiling in his room, confounded, appalled, it says.

He goes about his work at 648 B.C. And you're here. What are we to do?

For Daniel, Gabriel's appearance in 15 to 19 and the interpretation given in 17 to 27, including his reaction to it, throw him forward in time and fill him with anxious dread.

[19 : 21] We know that the time of Daniel, the power on the world stage in Babylon would shift to Elam and to citadels like Susa and go by the name of Media, Persia.

The text itself actually indicates that for you. The ram-like existence of the Medes and the Persians, we know, as a matter of historical record, was rather short-lived.

For the goat-like Greece came swiftly. And yet, even the power of one like Alexander the Great was quickly broken off, dead by the age of 32.

And from Alexander's united kingdom, as it were, followed a conspicuous scurr. In simple terms, his kingdom was divided into four parts, each ruled by one of the leading generals.

angels. Their names are for all who would study history. In a time from Seleucus would come one named Antiochus IV, Epiphanes.

[20 : 40] He was most like the little horn that had hatred toward God and a disdain for the people who dwelt in Israel. The historical record lets you and me know that Antiochus Epiphanes ruled the Seleucid empire from 175 to his death in 164.

From 2 Maccabees, we read of what he did to Israel in the temple. Listen to the literature of Maccabees. Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to force the Jews to abandon the customs of their ancestors and live no longer by the laws of God.

Also to profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to the Olympian Zeus. They also brought into the temple things that were forbidden so that the altar was covered with abominable offerings prohibited by the laws.

A man could not keep the Sabbath or celebrate the traditional feast nor even admit that he was a Jew. At the suggestion of the citizens of Ptolemies, a decree was issued ordering the neighboring Greek cities to act in the same way against the Jews, to oblige them to partake of the sacrifices and to put to death those who would not consent to adopt the customs of the Greeks.

It was obvious, therefore, that disaster impended. The Maccabean record makes it clear. It goes on, Thus, two women were arrested for having circumcised their children, were publicly paraded about the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then thrown down from the top of the city wall.

[22 : 14] Others who had assembled in nearby caves to observe the Sabbath in secret were betrayed to Philip and all burned to death. So it is in 2 Maccabees 6, 1-11.

The evening and morning sacrifices were abandoned, historically, as a matter of record, until Judas was one of our own.

One of our own mentioned to me last week again that Christians should remember that the Jews would think of Judas Maccabees the way you would, in some sense, almost think of the advent of your own deliverer.

He was a full-fledged deliverer. The real deal. The real deal. Around 166, the hammer led a rebellion against Antiochus Epiphanes and he won.

And Jerusalem was taken back and with it the temple observances were returned. Jonathan Maccabee was appointed high priest and a festival was born. You know which one?

[23 : 42] Hanukkah. Hanukkah. For the wicks of the menorah remained miraculously lit for eight days at that time. Many in our own community here on the streets of Hyde Park will be celebrating Hanukkah within a month's time.

Still treasuring the record of our text. What are you to make of it?

Three things by way of application. I want us to remember something from this text. There's a couple of things we ought to consider from this text.

And there's a decision you need to make in light of this text. What do I want you to remember?

This text ought to give any reader a humble quiet respect for the Jewish people and the atrocities that unfolded as a result of the prophetic tradition.

[24 : 55] At the time Daniel got this vision, a celebration of lights was the furthest thing from his mind. The text says he was appalled. He knew enough to be disquieted, but the future was, according to 26 and 27 of our text, opaque.

He went about his work, but he remained in the dark. I suppose he sensed that the vision was a foreboding about his time after Babylon, not merely a time when nation would wage war against nation, but more importantly, when the Jewish nation would be made low.

In other words, this one who was pulled off into exile now knows that when it's time to go home, getting home from Babylon is going to be arduous.

one long, hard road of national sufferings, of an abomination that would desecrate a holy place.

And if you and I don't appreciate the appalling nature of that, then we haven't read our text well. But a couple of things to consider.

[26 : 25] This text is a fountainhead source for the challenges that move between Christianity and religious Judaism.

The contrast is in what each of our faiths thinks emerges on the other side of the text. For the Jew, the lights of Hanukkah celebrate a return to the temple as God's holy place to sacrifices through which atonement is made for the Jew.

Judas Maccabee is the deliverer, the one who displaced those who made an abomination. And yet for the Christian, the vision fits within a larger framework of our understanding of the one to whom the kingdom will eventually be given, Jesus of Nazareth, the ultimate light of the world.

Jesus, who in first century Palestine himself will enter the temple at a time of religious degradation and to his way of thinking restore it to its rightful place.

In John, you will read of him overthrowing money-changing men who no longer worship God aright. and beyond that, this Jesus will make claim that this kind of temple, the visible one that has its roots in Second Temple Judaism and before that Solomon's Temple and before that a tabernacle carried through a wilderness and before that a garden wherein we saw the presence of God with us, that all of those things were iterations to finally be fulfilled in his own self.

[28 : 27] For he said, destroy this temple and in three days it will rise up again and the apostles later indicate that to be his self understanding of his own mission. That he replaces it.

That there is a replacement motif in play intentionally by God in history. that ends with the Christ.

No wonder the two faiths are continually challenged. Jesus puts an end to the need for any morning or evening sacrifice.

For the Christian once for all. His blood shed the power to atone complete. If you need a vision-like animal, you want an apocalyptic-like animal, well, the Christian tradition has it.

It's not a ram or a goat. It's a lamb. They call him, we call him, the lamb that was slain.

[29 : 36] is a And so this vision for the Christian plays out something on a cosmic scale, even between his coming and the end, where the evil one will continue to war against the host of heaven and his saints.

And the Christian ought to know that getting home from here is going to be a long, arduous road.

Finally, you have a decision to make. How do you understand the text? Christian teaching holds that those who reject the lamb will one day meet him for themselves under the momentary image of another beast.

You can almost liken him to a bull with a horn who will overthrow and overrun everyone who does not submit to his kingdom rule.

For he's more than a lamb. He's the one to whom God has given a kingdom that lasts forever.

That's the claim. Yours is the choice.

[31 : 14] Flannery O'Connor does it better than I could do. She gives us a vision of what's on line. Like the writer of Daniel, she's got the ability to take you on a magic carpet ride of dark realities.

In her short story Greenleaf, we see what happens to a woman, Miss May, who awakens one morning to the sound of an awful chewing noise just outside her bedroom window.

Quote, Mrs. May's bedroom window was low and faced on the east. And the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood under it. She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing.

She identified the sound. A bull was tearing at the shrubbery from under her window. She turned on the dim pink table lamp and then went to the window and slit the blind.

The bull, gaunt and long-legged, was standing about four feet from her, chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor. And that may be the way Jesus appears to you.

[32 : 27] In the morning, she asks her servant, Mr. Greenleaf, to deal with the intrusion of the bull that is now entered into her world.

Mr. Greenleaf, she said, get that bull this morning before you do anything else. Do you understand? Where do you want him put at? Mr. Greenleaf asked.

I don't care where you put him, she said. You're supposed to have some sense. Put him where he can't get out. Whose bull is he? For a moment, Mr.

Greenleaf seemed to hesitate between silence and speech. He must be somebody's bull, he said after a while. Yes, he must, she said, and shut the door with a precise little slam.

Later, Miss May is annoyed when she learns that the bull is still on the loose. And I've told you this morning again that Jesus is still on the loose waiting for you to decide what to do with him.

[33 : 31] All right, Mr. Greenleaf, she said, go get your gun. We're going to shoot that bull. They go off into the field in search of the bull. Mr.

Greenleaf disappears into the woods. In a few moments, something emerges from the tree line, a black heavy shadow that tossed its head several times and then bounded forward.

After a second, she saw it was the bull. He was crossing the pasture toward her at a slow gallop.

And through my words, he's coming to you yet in that way today.

A gay, almost rollicking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again. She looked beyond him to see if Mr. Greenleaf was coming out of the woods too, but he was not.

Here he is, Mr. Greenleaf, she called and looked on the other side of the pasture to see if he could be coming out of the woods, but he was not. She looked back and saw the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her.

[34 : 36] She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in freezing unbelief. And you? She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was.

And the bull had buried his head in her lap like a wild, tormented lover before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart, and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip.

She continued to stare straight ahead, but the entire scene in front of her changed. The tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky, and she had the look of a person whose sight had been suddenly restored, but who finds the light unbearable.

You have a decision to make. If the Christian interpretation of how Daniel's visions eventually play out in full is true, then there isn't a more important decision he will ever make.

What will you do with Jesus? Is he the Lamb of God that mediates through his blood a temple that takes you into the presence of a God whom you have offended?

[36 : 22] And is he this hard, charging, promised to return for you horn?

You must either allow Jesus into your life knowing that he's going to eat up every shrub you planted and call it, your heart, his home, or you're going to call him Mr.

Greenleaf to get rid of him for you and deal with his hydroplaning approach.

Submit to him or get rid of him. The decision is yours. Heavenly Father, as we consider these strange visions of old, we do first ask that you would give us great humility of spirit when we consider the atrocities on the religious landscape of history and we ask that we would live with humble respect unto all.

God and our Lord, I pray more particularly that for those who follow Jesus, you would help us to know that the road home is long and most especially for those here today who yet waver are unsure may they come to Christ while he may be found.

[38 : 21] May you pierce their heart with faith in his name. Amen.