

# Daniel 8

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[ 0 : 00 ] There's a concept that goes back to ancient Greece.! It was only formally established in 1901.

! And that is that there are four basic tastes.! Sweet, salty, spicy, and bitter.

Just a few years later, in 1908, the genius Japanese scientists came up with the greatest of all tastes, umami.

The best translation we have for it in English is delicious savoriness, which is what my nickname was in high school.

Now, the most interesting and intriguing foods are those that have a combination of these tastes.

[ 1 : 02 ] When the variety hits your palate at the same time. If you're familiar with the greatest animated movie of all time, Ratatouille, you've seen this.

Just take bittersweet as an example. Coffee, grapefruit, dark chocolate, for sure the king of the bittersweet flavors.

This combination of tastes leading to fascination and intrigue is not just true of food. Isn't, I mean, isn't most of life like that? You ride a roller coaster, knowing that you have to go home after the roller coaster, but you're still on the ride.

That's bittersweet. You get a new job, which is awesome, except for the fact that you know that there's a whole lot you gotta learn, but it's a new job. You go to the Bears game, knowing that they will almost surely lose, but you're still at the game.

Our text, like most of life, is rather bittersweet, and in case you missed it, it's not normal. Especially like as an Advent sermon, like, are you kidding me?

[ 2 : 22 ] What are we doing? What is Daniel seeing? Some of us love texts like this. Some of us would rather not even have these texts read in church.

And like, if you're not a Christian, you're like, what the heck is going on? While we don't always get the clarity we want, I do think we can understand texts like this.

When it comes to texts like this in the Bible, these wild visions, let me give you just one basic piece of encouragement. Don't get trapped in the details and miss the meaning.

I'd say you might ask the question, how the heck are we going to get to meaning then? Well, this morning, just in case you thought that the reading was crazy, we'll overview it just to understand just how crazy it is.

And then we'll talk about the bitter. And close talking about the sweet. Throughout the sermon, I have one simple question that I would like to answer, which is this.

[ 3 : 29 ] If we could know the future, how would we respond? This wild text does tell us part of Daniel's future and shows us how to respond even in our own time.

But it isn't easy. It's a bittersweet burden, which is the title of the sermon this morning. So let's start with the overview. I mean, in its basic parts, it's pretty simple.

It's just a vision and an interpretation of that vision. If only it were so simple. The vision comes, according to verse one, two years after the one that Daniel had in chapter seven.

It's a terrible time under Babylonian captivity. The Jews having been taken away, just as God had promised many years before this, and things were not great.

Two years earlier, Daniel had been shown a series of powerful beasts. Who would come one after another, and a God and his champion, who would put the world to rights.

[ 4 : 41 ] Rest, peace, justice, and eternal happiness were coming, but it takes a minute to get home. Daniel, at the close of chapter seven, verse 28, is greatly alarmed, which makes sense.

Two years have gone by, and nothing has changed. God often takes his time in the Bible, which means it shouldn't surprise us when it takes a little bit of time in our own lives.

The vision in our text is a lot like chapter seven, but it is much more concrete. In other words, there's a lot less guesswork as to what's going on here than what went on in chapter seven. And yet, it does run along similar lines.

Daniel didn't ask for the vision. It just comes out of nowhere. Like many visions in the Bible, this one communicates by symbols, which might sound crazy to you, especially if you're not familiar with the Bible, but you know, Aesop's fables.

A tortoise and the hare, right? We're all like, yeah! As kids, we're like, go hare! And nope, just bails, and then it's the tortoise who just carries on. Slow and steady wins the race.

[ 6 : 08 ] Oh, that's all you need to know, right? And everybody already knew that. And yet, we learn something profound by hearing an intriguing little story about a tortoise and a hare. This is very similar.

It's throughout all of literature, communicating profound truths in symbolic fashion. It's not unique to the Bible. Daniel, in this vision, is transported to Susa in verse two.

The future seat of power and the kingdoms that are to come. While he's there, he sees in verse three a ram. This ram has two horns like a normal ram, and yet one of them is bigger than the others.

It's like a lopsided ram. He charges everywhere, doing whatever he wants, and according to verse four, he becomes great. He looks unstoppable. That is, until, of course, you have, no joke, a flying unicorn goat.

If you've never read the Bible, guess what? There's unicorns in the Bible, right here, chapter eight. This unicorn goat, in verse five, comes out of nowhere, slams into the seemingly unstoppable ram, blows him to pieces.

[ 7 : 22 ] And this goat, according to verse eight, grows exceedingly great, even greater than the ram. It seems even more unstoppable, but that unicorn horn breaks. And if that weren't weird enough, then four come up in its place, all going different directions.

If you thought a unicorn goat was terrifying, what about a four-horned goat? No thank you. Just in case that made sense to you, verse nine, a little horn comes out of one of the horns. That's not normal.

And he grows, according to verse nine, exceedingly great. It grows great to the level of the host of heaven, trashing stars. And in verse 11, it becomes as great as the prince of the host, wrecking worship in the temple.

And just in case all that sounded normal, in verse 13, one angel asks another angel, how long is this going to go on? You'd think the angels would have it all figured out, but even they have questions.

I don't know why the second angel knows the answer to the question the first angel has, but that's the way it goes. 2,300 days and evenings. That makes sense.

[ 8 : 30 ] What on earth does all of this mean? Well, if you have that question, you are in good company because Daniel doesn't have a clue either. Daniel, the man who could interpret the dreams of kings by the power of God.

That's what he said all the way along in every chapter leading up to this one. Whenever there was a dream and he was called on to interpret it, he was like, yo, get it straight. I don't have some kind of magical ability. It's God who does it, which is clear here because he needs help.

He doesn't understand. Just right there. When it comes to obscure texts in the Bible, know this. Even the ones who get the vision are like, hey, what's up with this thing?

So if you think you have it all figured out, congratulations. The angel Gabriel shows up and Daniel understandably in verse 17 is frightened, which is often the response when angels show up.

They're not fat babies in diapers. They are terrifying warriors of God and flames and all kinds of stuff. I can only imagine what you would do if an angel showed up. The explanation that Gabriel gives at first is, you know, not exactly detailed in verse 17.

[ 9 : 53 ] Here's what he says. Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end. Yeah, that clears things up. The time of the end of what?

Well, remember that context determines meaning. In the love letter or a text message, same thing here.

As we keep reading, it doesn't seem to mean the end of everything, but the end of sufferings laid out in this vision.

This doesn't make Daniel jump around and shout for joy. But instead, verse 18, drop into a coma-like state. It's a bittersweet burden.

It's like, you know, if we brought up goats. You know those weird fainting goats? I was around fainting goats once.

[10:54] I tried to make them faint. Didn't work. The owner of the goats was not happy. That's what happens to Daniel. Here, he hears this and just, boom, falls out.

Gabriel wakes him up. And explains more. And the explanation is just as wild as the vision. It's so wild that many would say it couldn't possibly have come at this time in this place.

Why? Because there's no guesswork about the future. What is Daniel's future is our past. So what is laid down here is what we know as history. And yet happens through a declaration from an angel to a man serving a Babylonian king years before it happens.

It's one of the most detailed and concrete foretellings of history in the entire Bible. Let me just look at the explanation Gabriel gives.

Who's the ram? You don't have to guess. Verse 20. It's the king of Greece. You and I know him as Alexander the Great. He comes after, sorry, the ram in verse 20.

[12:14] That's Media and Persia. Run that back. Don't want to get that messed up. That's Cyrus and Darius. The unicorn goat. That one is the king of Greece.

Alexander the Great. What about the four that replace him in verse 22? We actually know their names. Lysimachus, Cassander, Seleucus, and Ptolemy who come at Alexander's death.

Not nearly as powerful. The kingdom splits into four. And that little horn in verses 23 through 25? Well, the big bad Antiochus Epiphanes.

One of the worst enemies God's people ever faced. Just as foretold, he came from nowhere. Had massive destructive success.

Fooled everyone. Destroyed worship in the temple. Killed all kinds of people. Raising himself to the level of God. Just as one example, he had a coin minted which was common for rulers.

[13:16] Had his face on it. Yet, only somebody as bold as Antiochus Epiphanes would put an inscription on the coin, God manifest. Which is quite something.

And yet, even he is taken out in verse 25. Quickly by God himself. A God who often uses unlikely means. Which is just what he did with the Maccabees.

When they took out Antiochus in 164 and restored the temple. It's celebrated every year in the festival of Hanukkah. You might be like, okay, cool.

So what are we supposed to do with that? It's clearly a bittersweet burden. Look at the response of Daniel in verse 27.

He's overwhelmed. And sick. It would make sense for us to be the same. Especially when we consider the bitter implications of what is laid down in this vision and interpretation.

[14:25] Rather bitter. I mean for one, God has a longer timeline than we do. You frustrated this morning?

You heard in the prayer this morning. Petitioning God for a lessening of violence in the city of Chicago. That weird incident Dave mentioned last week offhand.

The governor of a state in Mexico getting shot. That happened two weeks before I landed on the ground. 10,000 troops were in the state. We had to pass checkpoints every few miles.

And the only reason we didn't get strip searched is because there was a white guy in the car. It's good to be an American every once in a while. I know that people got strip searched because a lot of the pastors that came to the workshop did multiple times on the way.

Just to make sure that nobody was out to assassinate anybody else. And that's peanuts compared to what a lot of our brothers and sisters go through around the world.

[15:39] Or even something in your own life. Don't you stand back every once in a while and go, just when is it going to be over? I mean shoot, some of you just spent Thanksgiving with your families.

So, there's that. God has a longer timeline than we do. God's people would go home just as he promised before he sent them into exile.

But Daniel would never see the day. And now he knows it. He's an old man. He would never see the time of peace because even when they go back it's going to be incredibly complicated.

Not only does God have a longer timeline than we do, but if this vision is any indication that when one kingdom falls, then another just takes its place.

It just happens over and over again. You might long for the current government in this country to last forever or you might want it to be done away with in a minute.

[16:44] You might long for the next administration to come. Guess what? It's going to be mostly useless just like this one. And even if it is a little bit better, just wait for it because four years after that it's just going to go right back into the dumpster fire.

Anybody who thinks that like everything's going great just needs to know you're ignorant of history. It's always been a mess. We're constantly tempted to believe that it will turn around at some point, but kingdom follows on after kingdom.

It's never that great. It could always be worse and just might be around the corner. Who knows? It's quite bitter. Not only does God have a longer timeline than we do, and not only does just reality that one kingdom falls and another kingdom comes into place, but maybe most disturbingly, it's quite bitter that God allows his people in places of worship to suffer defeat at the hands of tyrants, and he doesn't tell us why.

I don't know how much you know about the Bible, but it's not a book of inevitable victory. In fact, it's the story of crippling defeat over and over again. It's like that candle in the midst of a hurricane that never quite goes out, but always looks like it's going to.

God's people are often confused, questioning why, how long.

[18:33] And crying out to God for help. Oh, if this vision is any indication that it's a lot like a lot of our lives, it's quite bitter, but remember, the flavors are awesome when they're combined together, because it's not just bitter, it's also rather sweet.

I mean, here's the deal. God's people are, according to this vision, going home. God had not just promised it in places like Jeremiah chapter 29.

Oppression in your homeland is not easy, but you can only be oppressed in your homeland if you're home. Oh, they were going home. God had promised it.

He'd always been faithful up to this point with his promises, and yet Daniel looks down the corridor of time, and oh, sure, there was going to come some oppression in the homeland, but that means they're going home.

Just like you promised. Not only are they going to go home, but worship is going to be restored. Remember that there is no sure access to God in Babylon.

[19:48] There's no temple in Babylon. Yeah, that's true. The little horn, Antiochus, would desecrate that temple.

But you can only desecrate something that exists. Reunion with God was coming. Not only were they going home, and not only was worship going to be restored, but here's the good news.

The evil has an expiration date. You notice that 2,300 mornings and evenings in verse 14. Oh, it would take a minute, but it would not be everlasting.

In fact, the irony of this passage is, it's when kingdoms seem the strongest that they go down. I began with a question. If we could know the future, how would we respond? Let me offer a suggestion.

[21:03] Follow Daniel. Just look at him in verse 27. He was overcome and sick for some days. That is true. Then, he rose up and went about the king's business.

Even though he was appalled and confused. Hey friend, you overcome, sick, appalled, and confused today?

Makes sense. Here's the question. What are you going to do about it? Now, if you're not a Christian, good luck. This is all you really got.

So you can either go the apathy route and just give up on life, or you can go the advocacy route and try to take over. Guess what? None of those have ever worked. Maybe there's a better way.

See, if you are overcome, sick, appalled, and confused, then get about the king's business.

Especially given the fact that Daniel's future is our past, and we know not only about the past, but about our future as well.

[22:19] You see, while this vision ends with the downfall of Antiochus, it wasn't exactly great after that. The end of that series happened, but, you know, power abhors a vacuum, and after Antiochus, there were others' powers.

As soon as you kick in from A.D. to B.C., you've got the Romans in power.

Crazy enough, you heard it in the prayer this morning, a little kid shows up. It's what we celebrate during Advent. The birth of Jesus Christ, Messiah, God with us.

And everybody is excited because they're thinking when Jesus shows up, oh, he's here to show up and show out. Everybody is super on board with Jesus ruling and reigning, as long as what that means is destroying the Romans.

While it looked pretty good there for a minute, Jesus kept saying, nah, it's not what I'm here for. And never did it look like the powers of this world would always be in charge than when that same Jesus, who had not only proclaimed that he was the champion king sent from God, and not only had done miracles to prove it, but it looked tragic when he hung dead on a Roman cross.

[ 23 : 59 ] But remember, God often works through unusual means to win victory. We know that evil has an expiration date because that same Jesus, God's son, defeated all evil in the resurrection.

It's through Jesus that temple worship is fully restored, not in any building anymore, but just go ahead and read Ephesians 2 this afternoon. That's all who would believe in him.

Restored for all time. And as a result of Christ's work, God's people are going home, not to some geographic territory. No, you and I are going home to heaven, but it'll take a minute.

It does give us all the hope in the world, but it is a hope that we are going to need because if the rest of the Bible from Daniel on forward is any indication, then oppression just keeps on coming.

Go ahead and read Revelation this afternoon. Good Advent reading. It goes from bad to worse and keeps on ticking.

[ 25 : 09 ] That is right up until the end. You know, the angels here in verse 13 ask how long? Profound irony is it's not just a question in the angels or in the people of God through all time.

No, according to Revelation chapter 6 verse 10, it is even the question of the saints who are secure in heaven under the altar of God. Before the end comes, they're still like, okay, so how long until this is all over?

We may not know why God allows tyrants to destroy God's people, but we have this confidence. The worst the enemy can do is kill us and fill heaven in the process.

So I return to the question. How should we respond to knowing the future? I think the point of the passage is this. Knowing the future should cause us to humbly carry on in the king's service.

In other words, we're about to go about our king's business. Come what may, all of God's people ought to confess.

[ 26 : 25 ] Jesus says himself in Matthew chapter 28 verses 18 through 20 that our resurrected king has all authority on heaven and on earth.

We're about to go about our king's business. Therefore, we make disciples everywhere we go. We baptize them and lead them into all obedience, firm in the confidence that he is with us even to the end of the age.

Friends, if that Jesus is with us, then what could possibly stop us? Don't get me wrong. There will be days when you wake up and just like Daniel, you are sick and overcome, appalled and do not understand.

In fact, if you're not a Christian here and you're like, this sounds pretty good, but I don't exactly know what you're talking about. Come talk to me after the service. Because wouldn't it be great if there was a king that won everything? And that's the message that Christians proclaim.

It's not only the message that we proclaim, no, it's the message that drives us to confront a world of rising and falling kingdoms one after another. Because if that king is really the king of all kings, what do we got to be scared about?

[ 27 : 43 ] It is a bittersweet burden. Shoot, you might want a different taste. But the one we have is far more fascinating and intriguing than we could possibly imagine.

Knowing the future should cause us to humbly carry on in our king's service until the end.

Let's pray. God, we thank you for strange texts like Daniel 8.

That help us make sense, not just of the past, but of the future. And while we are so often overcome, sick, appalled, and lacking understanding, we pray that you would give us confidence. Not in what we do not know, but in what we know. Because what we know is enough. I pray for those who do not believe.

[ 29 : 00 ] Would you work in their hearts and minds. Showing them the incredible freedom of the confidence that we have in Jesus.

And for all of us who do believe, I pray that you would give us immense joy and satisfaction amidst all of our sickness.

All the times we wake up appalled and not understanding. Would you give us confidence and joy that while we might not know today, and we might not know what tomorrow may bring, we know what the last day will bring.

And that is enough. Help us carry this bittersweet burden faithfully until the end. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.