

Daniel 8:23-27

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The Vision of the Ram and the Goat Explained:

A king will come from one of these Greek kingdoms. He will be deceptive, crafty, powerful, and will destroy many men, including many Israelites. He will defy God and glorify himself as God. The prophecy is true that he will halt the temple sacrifices, but he will ultimately be killed. This prophecy concerns both Antiochus Epiphanes and the antichrist in the end times.

Daniel is sick for many days, and still does not fully understand what he saw.

Gabriel the angel continues to explain to Daniel the meaning of the vision he has seen. A ram with two horns, representing the Medo-Persian empire, was slain by a shaggy goat, the Grecian empire. The large horn of the shaggy goat (who we know to be Alexander the Great) will break off/die and four horns/rulers will arise from it. From the ashes of Alexander's conquest, four of his generals fought for control of the conquered lands. Four kingdoms were established from this conflict, each ruled by one of Alexander's generals: Ptolemy took Egypt, Antigonos took Asia-Minor (modern-day Turkey), Cassander was king of Macedon (Northern Greece), and Seleucus ruled in Babylon, Persia, and much of the Middle East.

Gabriel explains how this future, fractured Greek empire will affect Israel. With the hindsight of history we can fill in some details. A descendent of Seleucus, Mithradates, would take rulership of Israel in 175 BC. This was *In the latter period of their rule*, (the four Greek kingdoms). The Romans would soundly defeat and rule over the Greeks twenty nine years after Mithradates took his throne, in 146 BC. It is the *latter period* of these dynasties, *When the transgressors have run their course*. The *transgressors* refers to the Greeks.

Throughout the Bible, God reveals that He allows things to *run their course*. He allots time for kingdoms and rulers to repent, or suffer the inevitable consequences of cause/effect which He installed in the moral universe. All human action is overseen by Him and allowed by Him. God told Abraham that He was giving the Amorites four hundred years to repent of sin, while knowing that they would not turn away from their wickedness (Genesis 15:16). King Solomon writes that there is a time for everything, "every event under heaven," appointed by God (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11). The days of every single man and woman's life is numbered and determined by God (Job 14:5). Simultaneously, every person has a real choice, and their choices have immense impact on the world, and even upon eternity. Examples would include the immense impact that Adam and Eve's decision had upon the world (Romans 5:12), and the fact that heavenly beings are watching the decisions and actions of humans in order to understand the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). ([For more on this subject, read our Tough Topics Explained: Founding Paradox](#)).

Just thirty years before the rise of Rome (in 146 BC), *A king will arise*. History tells us this was Mithradates, ruler of the Seleucid kingdom. He will be *Insolent and skilled in intrigue*. He will

be a political schemer. *His power will be mighty, but not by his own power.* Mithradates was not a *mighty* ruler in his own right; he took the throne only by rallying public support and wresting it from another illegitimate ruler, Heliiodorus, who had arranged the death of the true king Seleucus. Seleucus's son Demetrius was the legitimate heir to the throne, but he was held captive in Rome when his father was killed.

Thus Mithradates overturned one usurper only to make himself king. The throne was not something he established for himself, it was stolen by *intrigue*, violating the natural order of succession. His *mighty power* was not something he developed. Rather, it was already in place due to the Seleucid dynasty that built it before him.

Once in power, Mithradates renamed himself Antiochus IV, after his father Antiochus III, probably to assert legitimacy over the minds of his subjects despite the reality that he was also, in some sense, a usurper. He later added the name "Epiphanes" which indicated that he was an "epiphany" of god.

Antiochus IV was a terror to the Jewish people. Formerly, Judea was allowed to maintain its culture and religion under Seleucid rule. No longer.

*And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree
And prosper and perform his will;
"And through his shrewdness
He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence.*

Antiochus had no qualms about taking lives, as foreseen here. The vision describes that *He will destroy mighty men and the holy people* and that *he will destroy many while they are at ease.*

Antiochus led successful campaigns into Egypt. The struggle for the scraps of Alexander's empire continued 150 years after his death. Antiochus took control of most of Egypt, even capturing its king, Ptolemy VI, and making him his vassal. Not only did he *destroy mighty men*, he focused his cruelty on *the holy people*, the chosen people, God's people Israel. This persecution had no natural basis; there was no uprising to correct. The Jewish people were not seditious toward their Greek overlord until he began his efforts to destroy their culture and force assimilation. Given the insights about the spiritual dimension at work revealed by this vision recorded in Daniel 8, we can deduce that this strike against God's people was satanically-inspired.

This hostility came from a sinful heart. Antiochus was a man of outrageous pride. Here Daniel sees the supreme level of the king's ego: *And he will magnify himself in his heart.* This reflects Satan's attitude, who said, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14b). We can infer that Satan influenced Antiochus Epiphanes. It would follow that Satan's top priority would be to stomp out God's people, and terminate the lineage of the promised Messiah, who is destined to supplant Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31).

Earlier, Daniel saw how this ruler would glorify himself, he "magnified [himself] to be equal with the Commander of the host" who is God Himself (Daniel 8:11). In the vision, he was

represented by a horn that grew larger than all the other horns before it, even to the heights of heaven to pierce the stars and trample them (v. 10). *He will even oppose the Prince of princes.* During his reign, Antiochus named himself Antiochus Epiphanes, which means “God Manifest.” The coins during his reign were imprinted with Theos Epiphanes (“God Manifest”). He claimed he was a god, just like Alexander the Great before him had claimed. He targeted the Jewish people, *the holy people*, by forbidding their religious practices; he “removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down” (Daniel 8:11).

Antiochus attempted to force the Jews to assimilate into Greek culture and religion. He compelled the priests to eat pig meat, which was forbidden by the Law as unclean (Leviticus 11:7). His worst achievement is described here and in another vision Daniel would witness, where Antiochus would “do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation” (Daniel 11:31). The Abomination of Desolation (in other words, a wickedness which causes horror, something so evil it is disturbing and shocking) occurred when Antiochus set up a statue of Zeus in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, then sacrificed unclean animals on its altar.

This was written about by the Greek historian, Diodorus of Sicily (who clearly was himself antagonistic toward the Jewish people):

“...Antiochus surnamed Epiphanes, after subduing the Jews, entered into the temple of God, into which none was allowed to enter by their law except the priest. When he found in there the image of a man with a long beard, carved in stone sitting upon an ass, he took it to be Moses, who built Jerusalem and brought the nation together, and who established by law all their wicked customs and practices, abounding in hatred and enmity to all other men. Antiochus therefore, abhorring their antagonism to all other people, tried his utmost to abolish their laws. To that end he sacrificed a great swine at the image of Moses, and at the altar of God that stood in the outward court, and sprinkled them with the blood of the sacrifice. He commanded likewise that the books, by which they were taught to hate all other nations, should be sprinkled with the broth made of the swine's flesh. And he put out the lamp (called by them immortal) which burns continually in the temple. Lastly he forced the high priest and the other Jews to eat swine's flesh.

When Antiochus' friends had spoken about all these things, they earnestly advised him to root out the whole nation, or at least to abolish their laws, and compel them to change their former manner of living.”
(Diodorus 34:3-4)

Antiochus' goal was to crush the Jewish faith and blot out the Jewish God, *the Prince of princes*, from existence. His pretense for doing so was, in part, that the Jews were too exclusive, hating “all other men” and claiming to be *the holy people*. However, the truth according to this vision given to Daniel is that Antiochus Epiphanes' motivation was the oldest, foremost temptation, the deception that Satan whispered to Eve in the Garden, “...you will be like God...” (Genesis 3:4). Antiochus called good evil and evil good, which is a practice God judges (Isaiah 5:20).

Thinking that he himself was a god, Antiochus waged war against the true God and His people. His actions would lead to his downfall. The Jews rose up in rebellion, led by Judas Maccabees,

and overthrew Antiochus. Afterwards, Judea was self-governed for about one hundred years before Rome took over in 63 BC.

This Abomination of Desolation that Daniel witnessed in this vision took place roughly four hundred years after this dream, and roughly two hundred years prior to Jesus's prophetic assertion that the sign of His return would be when Israel saw the "Abomination of Desolation spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place" (Matthew 24:15). This indicates that something like what occurred during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes will occur again in the future (as of this writing in 2023). It is common for prophecies to have two or more fulfillments. It is also common for the second fulfillment to take a different form from the first.

For example, the prophecy that Jesus would be born of a virgin was first fulfilled when Isaiah married a girl who was a virgin at the time of the prophecy, then went in to her and she conceived and birthed a child. The prediction was that in the time in which Isaiah would marry the virgin, have a child, and the child be weaned, Syria would have its power stripped and no longer be a threat to Israel (Isaiah 7:12-16). The second fulfillment was quite different, in that Mary conceived a child by the Holy Spirit, while yet a virgin.

So this second "Abomination of Desolation" could have materially different characteristics and still fulfill the prophecy. However, Jesus's prediction seems to anticipate that the careful observer will be able to discern that the sign has occurred, since Jesus tells His disciples that whoever sees this sign should "flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:16).

By opposing *the holy people* and the *Prince of princes*, which likely refers to Jesus the Son of God, Antiochus sealed his doom: *But he will be broken without human agency.*

We know from history that Antiochus would die from disease, not by *human agency* or action. Antiochus was not killed by a knife or poison or a blow to the head. Jewish tradition maintains that it was God personally who struck him with a disease in his bowels (2 Maccabees 9:5).

Gabriel, the angel interpreting this vision, brings it to a close:

*The vision of the evenings and mornings
Which has been told is true.*

This is to emphasize that all these things Daniel has seen and heard of will come to pass. This message is from the Lord, who knows all and is over all, and only speaks what *is true*. The *vision of the evenings and mornings* references the time period between the ban on sacrifices in the temple to its restoration: "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored" (Daniel 8:14).

This proved true, just as God said. Antiochus' persecution began in late 171 BC and ended in December 165 BC, roughly a 6.3 year period (2,300 days).

Gabriel tells Daniel: *But keep the vision secret, For it pertains to many days in the future.*

Obviously, Daniel recorded this *vision* on paper, but he was told to *keep it secret*, for future generations to read. It *pertains* to a time far off in the *future*. The abomination of Antiochus Epiphanes' rule was hundreds of years away in the future from Daniel's lifetime, but according to Jesus, the Abomination of Desolation will occur again in the last days (Matthew 24:15). Like many visions in the Bible, this has partial and future fulfillments.

There are many parallels to the way this boastful horn (Antiochus Epiphanes) is described and the boastful horn (also known as "the beast," or "the antichrist") of the end times (Daniel 7:8, Revelation 13:5).

Antiochus is noted for his skill in *intrigue*, that he operates with *shrewdness*. His justification for persecuting the Jews was to paint them as hateful enemies to all other men. He was crafty as well as violent. His status as king was accomplished through opportunistic political maneuvering and populist appeal, not by right of inheritance. He would *cause deceit to succeed by his influence*.

And so it will be in the future for the antichrist. His deceptive abilities will be noteworthy:

"...the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and **false** wonders, and with all the **deception** of wickedness for those who perish, because **they did not receive** the love of **the truth** so as to be saved."
(2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)

He will be so deceptive and persuasive that even the leaders of Israel will trust him. He will enter into an agreement with Israel:

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week" in which he too will ban the sacrifices in the temple, just as Antiochus had, "but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering."
(Daniel 9:27)

The antichrist, the man of lawlessness, will defy the true God and claim that he is god, just as Antiochus would *magnify himself in his heart* and would *oppose the Prince of princes*, calling himself "God Manifest":

"...the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, **displaying himself as being God.**"
(2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

Thus, this prophecy has near and far implications. It is filled partially by Antiochus Epiphanes, but seems to also be a foreshadow of the man of lawlessness in the end times. In either case, for Daniel, it *pertains to many days in the future*. Daniel would live to see the Medo-Persians conquer Babylon (Daniel 5), but nothing beyond that. He is already advanced in years while witnessing this vision. God reveals these things so that Daniel will record them, to assure His people that He is sovereign over all, on His throne in heaven, and that even during the most wicked of days, He will ultimately win.

Much of what is written in Daniel is mirrored by the vision Jesus gave to John in Revelation. God's throne is referenced roughly forty times in Revelation's twenty-two chapters, and every adverse circumstance recorded is first authorized to occur from God, who always occupies the throne. Thus, the messages of Daniel and Revelation both make clear that God is the sovereign ruler over all. Nothing occurs that He does not allow. He does not sleep or slumber, but is the keeper of Israel, and of the entire earth, irrespective of what circumstances we might observe occur (Psalm 121:4-8).

Daniel concludes his account of this angelic visitation and the vision given to him: *Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days*. This supernatural encounter was so overwhelming for Daniel it knocked him down, so that he was lying in bed *for days*. He was both physically spent, *exhausted*, and ill, *sick*.

This is common for such occurrences. When God pulls back the veil that separates us from the spiritual world, those who encounter it are often struck with fear, ailment, or confusion. We are far more fragile than we realize. We tend to be oblivious to the spiritual dimension, but it is fully aware of and focused upon us (Ephesians 3:10). This is likely a reason why God tends to speak to us through prophets, through messages given to messengers to spread to the people at large. We can read these words given to Daniel without having to experience the curtain being pulled back on the spiritual dimension. God tried speaking to the Israelites directly after leading them out of Egypt, but His presence was so alarming (fire and smoke and thunder and trumpets), that the people begged Moses to be their mediator between them and God:

The Israelites said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die."
(Deuteronomy 18:16)

God actually told them that this was a good idea. He answered by promising to send them someone like Moses (a human) who would speak the words of God directly to them.

The Lord replied, "They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you [Moses], and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."
(Deuteronomy 18:17-18)

Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of this go-between communication; He was the fulfillment of this prophecy. Jesus was the second Moses. His Sermon on the Mount can be looked at as a second giving of the commands given at Mount Sinai. Jesus emphasized the same principles, but elevated the focus on the heart and inner attitude.

Jesus was the prophet which God raised up from among the Jewish people in fulfillment of Moses's prophecy, speaking God's words directly to Israel. He put on the flesh of man so that He could live among His people and speak to them without terrifying the crowds of Judea with the full glory of God. Daniel, however, received samples of this supernatural world and was overwhelmed each time.

After a number of *days* he recovered, writing: *Then I got up again and carried on the king's business.* He was not permanently injured by the incredible *vision*, but its effect lingered with him. He was still amazed by it: *but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.* Despite Gabriel's interpretation of the vision for Daniel, Daniel was no closer to understanding what it meant. There *was none to explain it*, there was no further explanation from God. If we put ourselves in Daniel's place, it would be difficult to imagine the fall of the mighty Babylonian Empire. It would be even more difficult to imagine a mighty power coming from the west, which at that time was puny in comparison to the great empires of the east.

We are able to better understand it because we have the benefit of hindsight, seeing the partial fulfillment through Alexander the Great, the Seleucid dynasty, and Antiochus Epiphanes.

Daniel was faithful, despite lacking understanding. He recorded the prophetic vision for future readers. We are able to study and ponder it to this day because of Daniel's obedience. He did not hide the vision in fear nor withhold the details of his fragility. At the heart of all prophetic visions from God is the truth that He is sovereign over the events that happen on earth, and no matter how difficult times become, no matter how many evil rulers rise and fall, God is above all and His will be done. If we add to this the lesson of Revelation, no matter how dire circumstances might be, God always calls us to be faithful witnesses, and not fear loss, rejection, or death. Daniel is an excellent example of what it looks like to be a faithful witness, an overcomer ([for more, read our Tough Topics Explained: Overcomers](#))

Biblical Text

²³ **“In the latter period of their rule, When the transgressors have run their course, A king will arise, Insolent and skilled in intrigue. ²⁴ “His power will be mighty, but not by his own power, And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform his will; He will destroy mighty men and the holy people. ²⁵ “And through his shrewdness He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; And he will magnify himself in his heart, And he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, But he will be broken without human agency. ²⁶ “The vision of the evenings and mornings Which has been told is true; But keep the vision secret, For it pertains to many days in the future.” ²⁷ Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.**