

HANDLING THE PRESSURE, DANIEL 8

Unshakable Faith #8

◆**Intro:** Do you sometimes wish you could just move to a state that shared all your political views, didn't have an income tax, people were better looking, and all drive through lines were short? One recent report said that because of Biden's open boarder crisis, 6000 people/day are entering the USA illegally. But what does it tell you? There must be a lot of people who wish they could just go somewhere that hopefully has less crime, more opportunity; or who long for a world where the good guys in the white hats run the show and don't get corrupt themselves. Mexico is a democracy, but one in which one political party has all the control all the time. Some of them must be hoping the US is better.

◆Not unlike some of us, the Jews in Babylon were surely hoping for a day when they got to return to the Beautiful Land as our text calls it. A day when no pagan king was on the throne and they were no longer controlled by a foreign power. So you can see perhaps why the visions God gives Daniel in chapter 7-8 leave him pale, bewildered, and confused. These prophecies of the future are not an improvement! As we saw in our study of chapter 7, Daniel is given a vision of three more empires that are to come after Babylon, all of which conquer the world as they know it, all of whom will rule the Hebrew people. This will happen all the way up to the time that the nation of Israel became extinct under the Romans. Daniel's visions show world history going from bad to worse under various empires until the

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end of days when God comes and does what people could not: sets things right.

◆ First a little history lesson. Then let's try and apply God's message to ourselves.

◆ **1. History 101.** We saw from chapter 2 and chapter 7 that God revealed 4 consecutive empires: Babylon (Lion/gold), Medeo-Persia (Bear/silver), Greece (Leopard/bronze), and Rome (monster/iron-clay). Two years after chapter 7, Daniel has a parallel dream and it's explained explicitly.

◆ Daniel 8:20-22 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 replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.

◆ A. Well now, we know from history that this is exactly what happened! The Ram (Persia) conquered Babylon to it's west in 539BC, continuing on into Syria, and Asia Minor (Turkey). Persia even made moves toward Europe by making raids on Greece. To the north it conquered Armenia and the area around the Caspian Sea. To the south it conquered Egypt and Ethiopia.



◆ B. And then came the Greek, Alexander the Great, who in 334BC, and at the age of 23, conquered Persia as swiftly as a flying goat in only three years.



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Just a small Billy Goat of 35,000 soldiers but tactfully skilled enough to defeat the big Ram of a hundred thousand Persian foot soldiers and ten thousand horsemen! Over the next few years Alexander conquered the whole of the Near East, took Egypt without a war, moved to Babylon to establish his capital, and died at the age of 33!

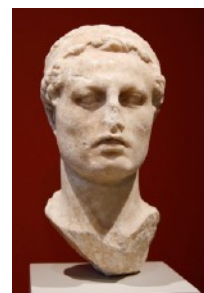


◆C. After Alex's death, his empire was eventually divided among four of his generals: Selucius, Ptolemy, Cassander and Lysimachus. [Still with me?] Verse 9 jumps a gap of 150 years of clashes between the Seleucids in the North (Syria) and the Ptolemies in the South (Egypt) until another horn arises. (Remember all these rules are Greek. Alexander succeeded in making the Greek language and culture predominant in all of the MiddleEast. btw Cleopatra was a the last active ruler of the Greek Ptolemies in Egypt when Rome conquered everybody shortly before the birth of Christ.)

◆D. Now were up to the little horn:

◆Daniel 8:9 Then from one of the prominent horns came a small horn whose power grew very great. It extended toward the south and the east and toward the glorious land of Israel.

◆Antiochus IV, the 8th ruler of the Seleucid kingdom in Syria (175–164 B.C.) called himself Antiochus Epiphanes (God reveals). People called him Antiochus Epimanes (Mad Man). He started out little because he was not heir to the throne—his nephew was. But through



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bribery, Antiochus became king and started his conquests. He “grew exceedingly great toward the south,” where he invaded Egypt; “toward the east,” where he conquered Persia, Parthia, and Armenia; “and toward the beautiful land,” that is, the Promised Land. And Antiochus is remembered in part for his severe persecution of the Jews. The Book of Maccabees, reports that Antiochus “ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy everyone they encountered, and to butcher all who took refuge in their houses. It was a massacre of young and old, a slaughter of women and children, a butchery of virgins and infants. In three days forty thousand died by violence and as many again were sold into slavery” (2 Macc 5:12–14).

◆ In 167 B.C. Antiochus issued the order that the regular ceremonial observances to Yahweh were forbidden, and thus sacrifices ceased being offered to him. Moreover, the book of Maccabees reports that “the king erected the abomination of desolation above the altar” (1 Macc 1:54). This probably refers to setting up a pagan altar for the Greek god Zeus. In addition, “Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practicing the Law, the king’s decree sentenced him to death” (1 Macc. 1:56–57).

◆ Daniel’s vision said the persecution would last 2,300 days; which comes to 6 years and 4 months, just short of 7 years which would be a complete period of judgement in OT numerology. So

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2300 days seems to represent a fixed but shortened period of judgement. It's also interesting that Antiochus IV deposed high priest Onias III in 171 BC. He desecrated the Temple in December 167 BC and offered unclean sacrifices. Three years later, to the day, the Macabbees revolted and the Temple and the altar were cleansed and used again in December 164 BC, seven years after Onias was deposed.. The Jewish celebration of Hanukkah (dedication) celebrates the rededicating of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 164.

◆ So 400 years of world history was clearly written down in Daniel before it happened. Some of you might say, well, Daniel's book was probably written *after* it all happened, but you would have no basis to think so. The Jewish historian Josephus records that the Jewish leaders actually showed Daniels prophecy to Alexander the Great, who didn't think much of it.

◆ **Part 2: Why would God tell his people history before it happens?** Note that God gives these prophecies to his own people. Starting with Chapter 8, Daniel is no longer written in Aramaic, the cultural language, but in Hebrew, the language of his people.

◆ Our study of Daniel 7 showed us that these kingdoms were "types" that would continue to happen in world history all the way to the End of Days. In New Testament language we call the "antichrists", men setting themselves up as God, something Antiochus explicitly did, as did all the Roman Caesars. Now why

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does God tell his people this history *before it happens*? Here are a few things about prophecy about future events.

◆A. The accuracy of Prophecy confirms the knowledge and truth of God! Who could possibly know something before it happens, and in such detail, except God. So later, when the Jews are reading their OT in 331BC while being invaded by Alexander, or under persecution of Antiochus IV in 175BC they can see what? That God's got this! -that's what prophecy can convince us of.

Did you notice the movement of God in the prophecy. They're subtle.

◆v8 The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off. By who? God.

◆v12 Because of rebellion, the host [of the saints] and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. By who? God.

◆16 And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision. Who said that? Only God directs the angels, but curiously, it sounded like a man!

◆v24-25 He will become very strong, but not by his own power... he will be destroyed, but not by human power. By whose? God's.

◆You see, God is always in it. And when you read your Bible today, the same words Daniel wrote around 539BC, and you look around you at political leaders who appear to cause suffering across a nation, and foreign leaders who appear to threaten world peace, you to know that none of this is unexpected.

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◆ God's got this. What about smaller empires with smaller tyrants? What about people who fear Dad coming home drunk again? Or the pressure of having to go to the shop where they all know you follow God, and they all make fun of you every day for it? Or the pressure of school mates who have decided to prove their maturity by doing something illegal and stupid, and if you don't do it too, then what? Can we respond to these things with virtue and hope instead of react to these things with crazed emotions? You can if you know God's got this. You can if you know that God's way wins, it's always the better choice, he knows everyone and everything, even what will happen tomorrow. As Daniel said back in chapter 2:

◆ Daniel 2:20-22 "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

◆ Look friends, there is a God, he knows everything. The things he says are true. It will always be to our advantage to believe what he says.

◆ B. Prophecy prepares us spiritually and emotionally for the future. How much more confident wouldn't you be if God appeared to you and told you about some trouble coming next year? When you got to next year, you wouldn't be surprised. You

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wouldn't have to panic under pressure. For example, I'll always be grateful to my mom for something she said when I was in grade school. I used to watch the High School kids get off the bus carrying these huge chemistry books, and geometry, and physics! I felt in my grade school self, "How will I ever be able to go to High School. I can't read a book like that!" And then came the tales of college, 4 hour long exams, and staying up all night to study, and I thought in my grade school self, "It's beyond me." And I was fearful of the future. But then my mom said this; "Don't worry about it. By the time you get to those stages you'll have more ability than you do now. It won't any harder for you than it is now because you'll be ready for it." After that I stopped worrying about doing my homework. I did it, but I didn't worry about what was coming. Fear and panic are debilitating. But knowing God's got this world in his hands, and your life too, brings the freedom to be courageous, and even compassionate under pressure.

◆C. Prophecy always builds the future hope of God's followers.

The Jews knew that God was going to allow them to be persecuted for their rebellion (v12). Rebellion always gets punished by the justice of God. The cycle of rebellion-suffering seems almost inevitable in a fallen world. It's one reason for suffering, but there are others we haven't time to look at today. Whatever the case we also know that God will limit the hardship

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his people face! That's what the 2300 days points to; a little less than 7 years. A little less than full judgement.

◆ And this is a characteristic of God: he will never let us be persecuted above what we can endure with his help. That makes a lot more possible than you can imagine.

◆ *1 Corinthians 10:12-13 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

◆ **Conclusion:** You may wish for a better country, or better rulers, or better opportunity. And that's not wrong. And we ought to work for it. The reality is, there will always be evil empires all the way to the end of time, when God judges all, and sets things right. But be encouraged. Time is measured out, it's duration is determined. And God limits the evil for the sake of his own. God knows and controls every detail of the future so we need not despair.

◆ Jesus our savior said his kingdom would be preached to the whole world, and quoting our text in Daniel, that things would get abominably worse. But it he would never let it be too much for his own! **Matthew 24:22 if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.**