

Appalled by the Vision

Here we go again with strange looking animals and horns and violence! Why should we spend our time trying to understand these things? For the same reason Daniel did: because we must live our lives in the light of God's vision for history and for the world. Let's, then, take a look at this phenomenal chapter.

Daniel 8:1-27

1 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. **2** 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. **3** 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. **4** 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.

5 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. **6** 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. **7** 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. **8** 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.

9 Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. **10** 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. **11** 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. **12** And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. **13** Then I heard a holy one speaking, 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?" **14** And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

15 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. **16** And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." **17** 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 the vision is for the time of the end."

18 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. **19** 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. **20** As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. **21** And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. **22** As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. **23** 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. **24** 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. **25** 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. **26** The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now."

27 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.

Let's make three important observations from this text.

I. There are some things we can understand and some things we cannot understand (vv. 15-17, 27).

Daniel sincerely sought to understand the vision, and Gabriel was commanded to make him understand, but at the end Daniel confessed that he did not fully understand. Here's the point: Daniel and we understand some things and do not understand others. Here are some things we can understand from this vision: a) God is in total charge of all history. History is His story. b) Behind all visible world events is a massive spiritual conflict between the forces of good and evil. c) God will consummate all history in a way that glorifies Him and also finally vindicates and restores His people. Here are some things we don't always understand from prophecies: the exact times of fulfillment, the names of individuals alluded to, etc.

It is important for us always to build our lives on what we can know rather than on what we can't know.

II. We must learn to be appalled at the evils perpetrated against God's people (v. 27).

In today's Church we have often forgotten how to be appalled. Daniel was appalled by the evils which would beset God's people at the time the "little horn" began desecrating the sanctuary of God (cf. vv. 9-12, 22-25). This prophecy was fulfilled under the evil reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (see the excellent notes in the ESV Study Bible).

III. We must learn to rise up and go about the king's vision (v. 27).

Daniel was so appalled that he lay sick in bed for several days, but then he got up and went about his business. So must we. We believe that God is in charge of history and that He is going to bring His saints to everlasting rest and peace; therefore, after we grieve the evils and afflictions of this life, we rise up to perform our daily tasks. Furthermore, since we are serving the King of Kings, even more readily, more enthusiastically, we rise up to do His work. We do not let the temporal disappointments nor the transient evils of this world keep us from His service.

And what is His business? Amazingly Jesus' ministry involves service to the Greeks—the very ones who oppressed and tortured us! His apostle, Paul, said that the gospel was for the Jew first and then also for the Greek. The very ones who sought to destroy the Temple are now being gathered as living stones to become the Temple of God! The appalling vision becomes the appealing vision of our loving Savior. Glory be to His Name.

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of Chapter 8, Daniel writes once again in the Hebrew language (chs. 2:4-7:28 were in the international language of the day, Aramaic), suggesting that this vision and the ones to follow were particularly for the benefit of the people of God. What is it about this vision which is peculiarly helpful to God's people?

2. Why is it important that we not claim to understand things that we cannot understand? Why is it important that we do understand the things we can understand?

3. What are some ways in which the Church of our day has failed to be appalled at the evils around us? Why is it important that we learn to be appalled?

4. Why is it so difficult to rise up and go about our business after facing the afflictions of this life? Why is it important that we do so?

5. What is the King of Kings' business that we especially need to be about today?