

Sermon – 11/11/2007 pm

Vision of a Ram and a Goat

Study Text: Daniel 8:1–27

Daniel had a second vision, this time during the third year of the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. Belshazzar was the last of the Babylonian kings. This kingdom lasted some 75 years. Daniel spent all his adult life in exile in this kingdom. The walls of his home city were broken down and the temple where he worshipped as a boy was in ruins. He was living among idol worshippers.

What would become of him and the people of God? They longed to return to Jerusalem and to worship the true God in his holy temple. But God had greater plans for his people, plans that went way beyond worship in a temple on earth. He revealed some of his plans for his people, and for the whole of creation, in these visions given to his faithful servant Daniel.

In his previous vision Daniel saw four great beasts coming up from the sea. These beasts represented kingdoms that would rule on earth. Whilst they are not named in chapter seven, two kingdoms are named in the interpretation of the vision in chapter eight. These two visions correspond in many ways as we will see, even if the emphasis is different.

Daniel identifies himself as the man who had both of these visions (8:1). He wrote down what he saw. The first one he wrote in Aramaic, but the second in Hebrew, his mother tongue. The focus of the second dream is more towards the Jews in exile. Daniel shows a deep concern for the future of the people of God. In fact he fainted and was sick for days after the vision (8:17). Daniel would not personally face the persecution spoken of in his vision – it was for *many days in the future* – but he still felt a deep burden for the future of the kingdom of God.

Daniel had long-term goals, goals for the kingdom of God not just goals to make his own life prosperous and comfortable. He *arose and went about the king's business* (8:27) with renewed zeal for the kingdom of God. Do you have a concern for the kingdom of God? Are you praying 'your kingdom come, your will be done'. Are you praying 'yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory'? Do you daily seek to glorify God in your life?

In his vision Daniel was in Shushan/Susa, the capital city of the Persian Empire. This was in the province of Elam, in what today is Iran. His vision was not about Babylon but about the two world dominating kingdoms that would come.

Ram

By the river Ulai, a tributary of the Euphrates, Daniel saw a ram with two horns. Such a sight would not be unusual except that one of the horns was higher than the other, and it was the one that came up last (8:3). This powerful ram pushed from the east. It pushed to the west, the north and the south. Nothing could stop the advance of this ram.

The angel Gabriel interpreted this vision for Daniel (8:16). He brings what in the end is good news, just as he did to Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-27). Daniel actually saw *one having the appearance of a man* and *heard a man's voice* which instructed Gabriel (8:15).

Calvin says this voice is that of Christ while others think it was the voice of God. Either way it was a voice of authority.

Daniel's reaction to this sight was just like that of John when he saw the risen Jesus. He was afraid and fell on his face. But Gabriel touched him and stood him up (8:18). He wanted Daniel to understand what the vision was all about. God does not leave his people in the dark with regard to the future. People run here and there wanting to know the future. The 'mind, body, spirit, festival' will offer all manner of information about the future to the gullible. How wonderful that God has told us already – and for free – if we have ears to hear!

The ram with two horns stood for two kings Gabriel said – the kings of Media and Persia (8:20). These kings came from the east and conquered Babylon in the year 539BC. Daniel was still alive when this happened (5:31). He actually told Belshazzar his days were numbered and that his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians – and it happened that very night. How reassuring would that be for a man of God!

In this coalition the Persians were dominant; hence one horn was higher than the other. It was like the Liberals in the federal coalition with the Nationals. This is not unlike the second beast in Daniel's first vision – a bear that was raised up on one side (7:5).

The Persians were pagans but did not persecute the people of God like later regimes. In his very first year Cyrus the Persian actually aided the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple, according to the will of God (Ezra 1:1).

Goat

As he watched Daniel saw a Billy goat suddenly come up from the west. This goat had only one horn initially. The goat moved fast and furiously to lock horns with the ram. After a brief battle the two horns of the ram were broken off. His power was destroyed and he was trampled into the ground by the goat.

This Billy goat symbolised the Greek kingdom. In 336BC Alexander the Great moved swiftly with his army to the east conquering all before him. He would be the large/notable/conspicuous horn that appeared first on the goat. At the Granicus River in 334BC Alexander crushed the Persians. 'With only 35,000 men Alexander's forces plunged through the river attacking Darius's 100,000 footmen and 10,000 horsemen, reportedly killing 20,000 at a loss of only 100 Greek troops.

Alexander became a general when just 21 years old. But by the age of 33 he was dead. Power went to his head and he made his soldiers bow down to him as if was a god. He died in suspicious circumstances. How true it is that those who live by the sword die by the sword. Moreover those who live with ever-increasing pride are setting themselves up for a sudden fall. We see this in history and we see it today. When will we learn?

When Alexander the Great went to his grave the Greek kingdom was broken up into four regions with separate rulers. Daniel saw four new horns grow up in the place of the single horn that was broken off the goat (8:8). Similarly the second beast of his first vision had four heads. These four new kingdoms did not have the same power as the single kingdom under Alexander (8:22).

Daniel's visions which stretch through history show how quickly kingdoms come and kingdoms go. We can look back in wonder at great kingdoms of the past. We have recently seen the exhumed body of Tutankhamen, an Egyptian Pharaoh. What a great kingdom he ruled over. But what is there today? Just a dead body in a tomb! How quickly the heroes of today fade away or in many cases become the horrors of the past. Let us remember that what is seen is temporary and passing away – only what is unseen remains (II Corinthians 4:18).

Time of the End

This vision goes on to tell of a little horn that came out of one of these four kingdoms. We do not have time to deal with his little horn now but will conclude with some words about the *time of the end* (8:17). Note that this is explained further in the passage as *the latter time of the indignation* (8:19). Indignation means the time of God's wrath.

From a New Testament perspective 'the end' means the second coming of Jesus. Some people, especially dispensationalists, take it to mean the same thing here in Daniel. But in the Old Testament 'the end' may refer to more immediate judgement, as indicated in verse 19. Moreover, at this point in history Jesus had not yet come the first time. 'It is the end of the Old Testament period and the ushering in of the New' writes EJ Young. It is the end of the special afflictions that are to come upon the Jews before the Messianic period. The focus of the OT is predominantly upon the coming of Messiah, the first coming of Christ.

Let us not forget that it was in his first coming that Jesus won the victory over Satan and all the forces of evil. It was at the Cross, and in his resurrection, that he won the victory. Some people get so wrapped up in prophecy that they forget this central message of the gospel.

I once visited a man who spent almost an hour showing me all the information he had gathered with regard to the prophecies of the Bible, especially things about the red heifer. It is easy to bewilder people with prophecy, and easy to get bewildered yourself. As I left I said to this man 'you have told me so much about prophecy but not said one word about the Cross of Jesus Christ. Do you really understand the gospel of Jesus Christ?'

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