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**Day 263 - September 20**

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## **The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE)**

### ***Daniel's Apocalyptic Visions***

**Readings: *Daniel 7:1-28, 8:1-27***

#### ***Reflections:***

- Daniel 7 opens in the first year of Belshazzar's reign. Daniel is now 67 years old and a lot has changed on the political landscape. It has been nearly 12 years since the last recorded activity from Daniel. After his early start as a young leader under Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is now serving as an advisor to a succession of Babylonian leaders. After Nebuchadnezzar, his son Evil-Merodach (nice name) reigns for two years (561-559 BCE). He is assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar who then rules for four years (559-555 BCE) until he is usurped by a man named Nabonidus (555-539 BCE). He enters into conflict with the priests of Marduk who opposed the effort to increase the worship of the moon-god, Sin. In 552 BCE his son Belshazzar becomes co-regent with him and begins his rule of the empire. During their rule, Babylon will rapidly decline. During Belshazzar's first and third year of reign, Daniel has two prophetic visions that portray the coming spiritual battles and the coming Messiah. Like Ezekiel, Daniel is given prophetic insight from God into the spiritual kingdoms that are a war and the hope that God is extending to his people of a coming king and kingdom.
- This first vision comes in the form of a dream. The winds of heaven are under God's control and show God's authority over the world. The sea may be symbolic of all humanity. The four beasts or four animals are four kingdoms. These kingdoms likely relate directly to the different metals in the statue of Daniel 2. The beasts were not alike. Their main characteristics as animals were enhanced with such things as wings to help portray their unique qualities. These additions also fit well with their idols which were often composite creatures.
- The first beast is a lion and is symbolic of Babylon. Jeremiah said that Nebuchadnezzar was like a lion, king of beasts, in Jeremiah 50:17. The wings on the lion may suggest the swiftness referred to in Ezekiel 17:3, 12. Nebuchadnezzar was viewed more sympathetically and so we see the reference to this animal having a man's heart or mind.

- The bear is an appropriate symbol of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Strength and ferocity figure in almost every biblical reference to the bear. This fits well with the massive Persian armies. Xerxes is said to have moved two and one-half million men to attack Greece. This bear is hungry and he was told to eat more.
- Then Daniel sees another change take place in the kingdoms. Where a lion is generally peaceful unless attacked, a leopard will attack for the sake of attacking. Most scholars see the leopard as Greece. The four heads probably refer to the division of the empire into four regions. Following the early death of young Alexander the Great, his empire was divided into: 1) Lysimachus in Asia Minor and Thrace, 2) Seleucus Nicator in Syria and Mesopotamia, 3) Cassander in Greece and 4) Ptolemy Soter in Egypt, Arabia and Palestine.
- Daniel now has a second part to this vision. This beast is too terrible to compare to an animal. It is more like a monster. Most scholars see this as the coming of the Roman Empire but there might be a more significant spiritual meaning here. This beast may also point towards a larger spiritual kingdom. The Roman Empire may be the physical representation of this monster but it seems as the dream unfolds that there is a larger spiritual war being waged. There was no animal like it in the wild. It is portrayed as being more ferocious than even all of the previous three animals combined. The iron teeth are consistent with the iron in the lower part of the metallic man in Daniel 2:40.
- Normally in Scripture the use of the image of a horn refers to the power of an animal. Here there were 10 horns. The number ten is a symbol of completion. Later in the interpretation we learn that these ten horns refer to ten kings or a series of kings that rule with complete power. Then Daniel sees something very strange. A small horn grows up and supplants three horns. It doesn't supplant all ten but just three. It is in a sense a larger expression of this power but it does not dominate the animal. This may refer to one of the emperors. In any case, this horn has human eyes in this little horn, a symbol of wisdom, and a big mouth that speaks arrogantly. This boasting horn and this beast ultimately are destroyed.
- The vision of God is magnificent and it mostly refers not to just a specific time in history but in the overarching plan of God. The Ancient One is described as pure and powerful in his holiness (images of pure white and fire). He is attended by tens of thousands of angels. He convenes his court like a ruling king and opens the books, the books of all the activities of humanity. This is the courtroom record that will be used in the judgment of humanity.
- It seems now in the vision we move into the spiritual realm and the monster kingdom and the horn (king) that is wise but full of pride is destroyed. This may refer to a human kingdom but it may also refer to Satan and the demonic forces that war against God.
- The other earthly kingdoms are stripped of their power but are allowed to live. This may refer to human kingdoms or again may be more of a symbolic picture of the spiritual

realities. Human governments remain as forces on the earth but stripped of their power. The battle is now between two spiritual kingdoms, God's and that of the monster. But the monster kingdom is doomed to destruction.

- There is one who opposes the boastful horn. One like a son of man comes with clouds (approaching armies causing dust clouds) of heaven. He is given divine, ultimate authority to rule and his kingdom is eternal.
- Daniel now asks for an interpretation of this dream and here we find more interesting information. "As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom." This statement seems to point towards the more spiritual interpretation of the monster and the horn as it refers to the overall story of salvation history.
- "He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times (literally two times) and half a time." This reveals a number of interesting thoughts about the spiritual world. 1) God has a plan, set times and governing principles; and 2) Satan's goal is to not just oppress God's people but mess up God's plan. In 1 Corinthians 2:7-10 we see that God's plan is hidden from the spiritual rulers and so in their attempts to thwart God's plans they end up playing directly into God's plan to their own destruction.
- The reference to the saints being handed over to the monster for a time of testing and suffering for a period of one, two and a half (in other words three and a half) probably refers to half of seven. Seven is symbolic of God. Therefore, in God's complete plan, the saints will be oppressed not for the full time but only for half of the time. Partway through, God will act decisively to release the saints. In time these same saints will rule under the leadership of the one like a son of man and all the rulers of the world will worship him alone.
- Daniel now has a second vision about a ram and goat that builds on the first vision. It is unclear from the phrasing in Hebrew if Daniel was in the citadel of Susa or just envisioned himself there in the dream. The ram is most likely the kingdom of Medo-Persia and the goat is Greece, and Alexander the Great the horn that ultimately divides into four sub-kingdoms (as we saw in the previous vision).
- The following passage is again very cryptic. This goat kingdom has a smaller horn that grows powerful. Many scholars see this smaller horn as referring to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who controlled the Seleucid kingdom from ca. 175-164 B.C. Antiochus was extremely hostile toward the Jews and persecuted them mercilessly. He apparently throws down some of the starry host (angelic hosts or a strange reference to the saints?) and tramples them to the ground. It sets itself up as a rival to God's prince of the hosts (Christ or simply opposing the right of the Jewish people to have a true king?). He stops the daily sacrifice in the temple and throws truth, the torah to the ground.

According to 1 Maccabees 1:56, Antiochus initiated destruction of the sacred books of the Jews.

- Then apparently two angels have a conversation about how long this will take. 2300 evenings and mornings may refer to a day and point back to the creation account. Or it may mean 2300 sacrifices, counting both evening and morning sacrifices. This would mean that it would be just over three years. Could this refer to the one, two and a half of the first vision? This again is unclear. We do know at the end of this time the sacrifices would be restored. The specific event that marked the start of this period is unclear. The event that marked the conclusion of the period is clearly the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem. This followed the atrocious and sacrilegious acts Antiochus had initiated. This took place on December 25, 165 B.C. The Jewish celebration of Hanukkah each year still commemorates this victory.
- A holy one, a man (one like the son of man) tells Gabriel the angel to tell Daniel the meaning and he does. Afterward, Daniel feels sick for many days as it is clear that although God will deliver his people, it will be in the distant future. What is to come is still appalling to Daniel.
- There are only two angels named in Scripture. Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21; cf. Luke 1:19, 26) means “man of God” and Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; cf. Jude 9; Rev 12:7) means “who is like God?” Both appear to be lead angels.
- These prophecies help us see that God is lord of all nations. He has times set and he rules even the rebel rulers of the earth. It also reveals the certain coming of a Messiah king who will initiate a kingdom that will rule for all eternity. As we look out at the landscape of our own world we can know that God rules in all power and the kingdom of Christ will ultimately triumph as a kingdom of peace. We also see that there are seasons of suffering for those who serve God but these are only seasons as God’s purposes will prevail.