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June 29th: Daniel 8 & Acts 22:23–23:11

June 28, 2021



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The ram and the goat. Paul before the Sanhedrin.

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Transcript

Daniel chapter 8. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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.

Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. 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. 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. 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. 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? And he said to me, For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.

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. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Eulai, and it called, Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.

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. 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. 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. As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia.

And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. 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.

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. 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.

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. 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.

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. The narrative chapters of Daniel ended in chapter 6. Chapter 7 opened up a series of visions which occupy the rest of the book.

Chapter 8 continues on from chapter 7, drawing upon many of its themes. However, chapter 7 was a transitional chapter between the Aramaic section of the book, from chapters 2 to 7, and the later visionary chapters. Chapter 8, along with the rest of these chapters, is written in Hebrew.

In chapter 8 we find a new vision of beasts, but this time it's not the bear and the leopard, but a ram and a goat, two sacrificial animals. Perhaps this is an indication of the greater scope of covenant concerns in this period. This vision, as we've noted, connects with what happens in chapter 7. The vision of the preceding chapter occurred in the first year of King Belshazzar, and this occurs in the third.

In his vision, Daniel is in the citadel of Susa, elsewhere referred to as Shushan. This site would later be the capital of the Persian Empire, so it seems appropriate that it is here that he sees the rise of the ram. The ram is described as having two horns.

The ram is a single entity. At its beginning, the kingdom of Media is the most prominent. However, through Cyrus, Persia comes to greater prominence.

Persia, in this vision, is the higher horn that comes up last. The two-horned ram corresponds with the bear of the preceding chapter, and the raising up of the bear on one side relates to the dominance of Persia within the confederacy. This is, within this vision, represented by the higher horn that comes up second.

The ram in this vision, later explicitly identified as Medo-Persia, challenges those who identify Media and Persia as two separate empires in chapters 2 and 7. The ram arises in the east, but it charges westward, northward, and southward. We might associate its northward conquest with Lydia, its westward conquest with Babylon, and its southward conquest with Egypt. While Daniel is considering the ram, he sees another creature rising up, a male goat coming from the west.

The west here is the region of Greece. To this point in biblical history, the dominant

powers had chiefly come from the north, the south, and sometimes the east. After this point, however, powers of the west would become increasingly important.

The male goat from the west is enraged at the ram. Greece suffered a very great deal at the hands of the Persians, and were only too keen to get their revenge. The male goat moves without touching the ground.

This corresponds, of course, with the winged leopard of chapter 7. The conspicuous horn of the male goat is readily identified as Alexander the Great. In the period of about ten years, Alexander the Great forges an empire of almost unprecedented size. He utterly breaks the two-horned ram, sweeping over the kingdom of Persia.

The ram is cast down to the ground and trampled upon. This might refer to the decisive victory at Gaugamela in 331 BC. At the height of the male goat's power and pride, his great horn, Alexander the Great, is broken.

Alexander dies at 33, and his kingdom is divided into four chief parts. This connects with the four heads of the leopard in chapter 7. James Jordan argues that these are four successive phases of the Greek empire, the final one being Hellenistic Rome. More commonly, and I think correctly, people associate this with the splitting of the kingdom after the death of Alexander into regions roughly corresponding with Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, Syria, Babylonia and the East, and then Egypt, Judah and Arabia Petraea.

Many people identify the small horn here as the little horn of chapter 7. However, while that horn related to the power of the Roman beast, this horn relates to the Greek beast. It also arises out of one of the horns, in a way that suggests that the horns exist simultaneously, not in succession as Jordan suggests. The figure in view here seems to be Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, who was a cruel persecutor of the Jews.

He arose from the dynasty that had taken control of Syria and Babylonia after the death of Alexander, the Seleucids. He was successful in war against the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, groups in the East, and most importantly, Judah. It is important to remind ourselves that the story that is being told in these prophecies is not focused upon what makes the biggest bang on the stage of earthly history, but is rather focused on the history of the people of God and the way that the covenant and God's purposes within it are working out in history.

In terms of this, while they may seem to represent a backwater from the perspective of many of the great empires of the time, Jerusalem and its temple are the very centre of the world. The significance of Antiochus IV Epiphanes is seen in his direct assault upon the worship of the people of God, actions that would later spark the Maccabean Revolt. He sought to replace the worship of God with the worship of Jupiter Olympius.

He abolished the daily sacrifice. Antiochus supported Hellenizing Jewish factions. Menelaus, the extreme Hellenizing high priest set up by Antiochus, had Gnaeus III, the legitimate high priest, killed.

A pagan altar, the Abominable Abomination of Desolation, was established upon the true altar and a pig was slaughtered in sacrifice. The period of the giving over of the sanctuary is declared to be 2,300 evenings and mornings. Scholars differ on whether this is a reference to 1,150 days, measured in evening and morning sacrifices, or 2,300 days.

Jordan sees some symbolic resonances of this number. Referencing the reign of Jehoash in 2 Kings chapter 12, he observes the 23 years period of time in which money was collected and no repairs were made. At this point Jehoash and the high priest repaired the temple.

Behind this Jordan sees the story of Athaliah. Athaliah was killed in her seventh year, after reigning for a period of time that would have been in the region of 2,300 days. He argues that we can presume that the true worship of the period later to be restored during the reign of Jehoash.

Taken as a literal period of 1,150 days, it might refer to the period of time between 167-164 BC, the period prior to the rededication of the temple. The man or the angel Gabriel is charged to teach Daniel concerning the meaning of the vision. Daniel is told that the vision refers to the appointed time of the end.

It is likely that we should see events surrounding Antiochus IV Epiphanes as prefiguring and anticipating events that happen at the end of the period of the beasts. Antiochus rose to power through deceit, subversion and intrigue. However his reign came towards the end of the period of Seleucid power in Judea.

A few decades after his death, Judea enjoyed semi-autonomy and then from around 110 BC, under the Hasmonean dynasty, enjoyed independence as an expanding kingdom. The cunning Antiochus set himself against human authorities and also divine authority. His rising up against the Prince of Princes is presumably a reference to his assaults upon the Jews, the Prince of Princes perhaps being Michael the Archangel.

However this proud king would be overcome, not ultimately by human might, but by divine. While other powers in this chapter had no one to come to their aid when they were assaulted, the people of God have the Lord on their side and although they may be seriously persecuted and even martyred, they will not finally be overthrown. A question to consider, how can this chapter be related to broader themes within the book, for instance the relationship between divine and human sovereignty? Acts chapter 22 verse 23 to chapter 23 verse 11 And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him

like this.

But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned? When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen. So the tribune came and said to him, Tell me, are you a Roman citizen? And he said, Yes. The tribune answered, I bought this citizenship for a large sum.

Paul said, But I am a citizen by birth. So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately. And the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet. And he brought Paul down and set him before them. And looking intently at the council, Paul said, Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Are you sitting to judge me according to the law? And yet contrary to the law, you order me to be struck? Those who stood by said, Would you revile God's high priest? And Paul said, I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him? And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

In Acts chapter 21 Paul was taken in the temple by the Romans after the Jewish crowd were on the verge of killing him, following the accusations of the Jews from the province of Asia. What had initially been intended to serve as a visit to strengthen relations between Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, and Gentile Christians elsewhere in the empire, was now provoking the most hostile of reactions among the Judean Jews. Of course Paul had been told this already by the Holy Spirit, and various prophets had

warned him about what awaited him in Jerusalem on his journey back.

However, now he is in captivity, with people seeking his life. His first attempt to defend himself before the crowd in the temple had just failed. The moment that he mentioned that he was sent by God to the Gentiles, the crowd wanted him to be put to death.

The extreme hostility provoked by the prospect of the Gentile mission might recall the reaction that Jesus received after his sermon in Nazareth, back in Luke chapter 4 verses 25-29. But in truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.

When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath, and they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. To the Jews in the temple, Paul's reference to going to the Gentiles would seem to confirm the accusations of the Jews from Asia, showing that Paul really had pro-Gentile beliefs and that he was probably compromising the covenantal purity and uniqueness of Israel. The fact that all of these things are occurring in Jerusalem should be considered.

Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets in the New Testament. Jesus was rejected as a prophet in Jerusalem, and his servant Paul must be rejected there too. Taking up the story at the end of chapter 22, the tribune, who had let Paul speak to the crowd to try to calm things down, now wants to get to the bottom of why the crowd so violently worked up about him.

The tribune probably did not understand Aramaic, so didn't hear what it was that made the crowd so furious at him. The tribune determines to take Paul back to the barracks and to flog him, hoping thereby to get the truth out of him. While Paul had received a beating with the rods in Acts chapter 16, here a whip would have been used, and the whip would be one with a wooden handle and leather thongs, with bits of metal and bone within it.

In Acts chapter 16 in Philippi, Paul had revealed that he was a Roman citizen after he had already been beaten. Here he does so just as they are stretching him out on the whipping frame to be whipped. Daryl Bach notes that this is likely at Gabbatha, where Jesus was probably also whipped.

On several occasions in the book of Acts, Paul uses some aspect of his identity to his advantage. He will do so again shortly after this, when he will identify himself as a Pharisee, suffering on account of his belief in the resurrection of the dead. We see Paul becoming all things to all men in 1 Corinthians 9, verses 19-23, so it was better to reach

them with the Gospel.

That sort of adoption of different identities is in order to remove any obstacle to the acceptance of the Gospel. However, here Paul is employing his ability to move between identities as a means of disguise and evasion. One moment Paul is a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a man raised in the city of Jerusalem, learning at the feet of the great Rabbi Gamaliel, speaking fluently in Aramaic and deeply conversant in the Jewish law.

A few moments later he is an eloquent Greek-speaking Roman citizen from a cultured city in Cilicia. The next day he will be the Pharisee born of Pharisees, who is being tried because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead. None of these identities is a false one, but Paul's adeptness in adapting his identity and approach to his circumstances and audiences is very clearly an important skill for his mission.

Bock quotes Cicero and Roman citizenship. To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder. Paul presumably has evidence on his person to demonstrate his identity.

Paul received his citizenship from birth, while the Tribune had to pay a large sum to obtain his, possibly with a bribe. We might wonder whether Paul's father was a man of some status. Ben Witherington makes the point that Paul was probably reluctant to reveal his Roman citizenship, especially in a situation where he was being accused of compromising with gentile identity and behaviour.

As soon as Paul's Roman citizenship is known though, they withdraw and call off the flogging. The next day, however, the Tribune wants to discover the nature of the accusations against Paul and summons the Sanhedrin to meet, placing Paul before them. Paul begins by looking intently at the Sanhedrin.

Perhaps he is seeking to get their attention, or perhaps he is carefully sizing them up in preparation for his use of their divisions against them later on. He was presumably fairly familiar with the Sanhedrin from past involvement with them. He had lived in Jerusalem for several years, been an outstanding student of the law, was taught by Gamaliel, one of their members, and had also been authorised by them in his persecution of the church.

There are probably still a number of familiar faces on the Sanhedrin, even though many of them have changed. Luke draws close parallels between Jesus' trials and Paul's trials. Jesus was tried before the council, before Pilate, before Herod, and then was brought before Pilate again.

In Acts, Paul is tried before the council, before Felix the governor, before Herod Agrippa II, and before Festus. Luke is eager for his heroes to recognise that Paul, like other key figures in the book of Acts, is conformed to his master. Paul begins his defence by

declaring that he has lived his life before God in good conscience, similar to the claim that he will later make in chapter 24 verse 16.

As Craig Keener notes, he is almost certainly speaking in Greek, the Jerusalem elite would be fluent in Greek, and more importantly the Tribune would be able to understand, and finally discover what the nature of the complaint against Paul actually was. The high priest Ananias, before whom Paul is being tried, was high priest from around 47 AD to 58 or 59 AD. He had a reputation as a corrupt man, using wealth and force to get his way.

Ananias orders that Paul be struck on the mouth by those standing near him. Paul rebukes him in response, calling God to judge him, saying that God will strike him, describing him as a whitewashed wall, perhaps a reference to his hypocrisy, in the same way as Christ refers to whitewashed tombs in the book of Matthew. He accuses Ananias of sitting to judge him, according to the law, but yet actually not observing the law.

As a whitewashed wall, he appears clean, but there is nothing behind the surface. He is not offering the impartial justice that the law requires, but has already determined Paul's case in his mind. He is immediately rebuked by those standing nearby him.

Why would Paul declare such a judgement or a curse upon the high priest of God's people? And strangely enough, Paul seems to accept this rebuke. He says that he would not have declared this, had he known that he was the high priest, and then goes on to quote Exodus 22, verse 28, You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. It is a strange series of events, and a number of different proposals have been made to try and explain it.

Some have suggested that, for some reason or other, Paul did not recognise that it was the high priest that gave the order. He was struck by those standing alongside him. Perhaps the signal was given by the high priest and Paul was looking elsewhere.

Or perhaps his failure to recognise was a result of his poor eyesight, an affliction that many scholars have speculated that Paul suffered from. Maybe he has just been away from Jerusalem for so long and he doesn't know that Ananias has become the high priest. Maybe it's just an immediate reaction and he doesn't consider that it is the high priest that he is speaking of.

Or perhaps he is giving a response that is purposefully ironic. He is affirming the law and his knowledge of it, but he is implying that the high priest is not to be recognised as the legitimate high priest. Determining between these positions is not easy, though perhaps we should see whatever position we hold that there is some irony here.

Whether Paul intends it to be so or not, his statement concerning the high priest is true and though seemingly retracted it still stands as such. Paul, as we have noted, is familiar

with the Sanhedrin and as he looks out at them he can recognise that there are different camps among them. They are divided among themselves between the sect of the Pharisees and the sect of the Sadducees.

Perhaps now that he recognises that he is not going to get a fair hearing he decides to exploit this and also to make his trial about the resurrection. This serves in part as a calculated means of causing confusion but it also functions to make Christ central to the trial rather than the hearing merely being about Paul himself. The reason why he is on trial, he insists, is because he believes in the resurrection.

That is the hope of Israel but it is also the reason why he has faced so much opposition. Paul knows the Sanhedrin well and as a result of his statement they are instantly divided between the two camps of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees, as Luke describes them, deny that there is a resurrection nor angel nor spirit.

The exact meaning of these denials is not entirely clear. The resurrection presumably is the bodily resurrection. The angel or spirit might be a reference to different modes of intermediate state.

Perhaps it is a reference to different angelic hierarchies. Or maybe it is a reference to speculation about angels. Or maybe it is a reference to not different modes of post-mortem life prior to the resurrection in an intermediate state but different modes of resurrection itself.

Resurrection as a sort of angelic being or resurrection as a spirit. There is immediately after this a reference to an angel or spirit in verse 9. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him? Elsewhere in the Gospels and also in Acts chapter 12 there are references to angels or spirits in association with persons. These angels or spirits seem to be some sort of post-mortem manifestation of the person.

A post-mortem expression that isn't just connected with the shadowy beings of Sheol. The Pharisees raise the possibility that some spirit or angel has spoken to Paul. As the assembly is thrown into tumult and becomes violent, the tribune takes Paul away from them, fearing that he will be torn to pieces.

That night the Lord appears to Paul again, declaring that he will testify concerning him in Rome just as he has in Jerusalem. Whatever dangers face him on the way, whatever dangers await him, to all intents and purposes Paul is immune until he reaches the city of Rome where the Lord has a great purpose for him. A question to consider.

In this chapter we see Paul using different aspects of his identity in a chameleon-like fashion, using them as crude means of disguise and evasion. Are there any ways in which we might follow his example in our own situations?