

The Pattern of History

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[0 : 0 0] Gracious Father, we do thank you that you speak to us through your word and that the problem rests not with you but with us in terms of understanding. And so, Father, we ask that you would help us to understand your word this morning, that we might be equipped to live as your people in this world.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, at my old church, the youth group often went ice skating. I've told you about one of those times before where I packed an extra pair of pants because I knew I would wet myself from the ice, that is, you understand.

But knowing that falling on the ice hurts, the next time I went, I decided I would brace myself for impact. So the next time I went, I actually took a cushion and strapped it to my backside.

So on the next slide is a picture. There it is, cushion. And on the next slide, there is me skating away, ready for impact.

And then on the next slide, here I am having suffered impact. Did it work? Well, yeah, a bit. I still felt it. But the point is, knowing what would come, I took measures to brace for impact with a cushion.

[1 : 1 5] Well, in today's chapter of Daniel, we have another weird and wonderful vision, as I said, about Israel's future as God's people. And this vision of Israel's future told them that persecution would come.

And the vision itself was meant to help them brace for impact, not with a literal cushion, of course, but with knowledge, which might help them persevere through that persecution.

And again, this is a timely topic. After all, persecution against the church is growing around the world. We saw, I think it was last week's mission spot, a number of places where it is growing.

India, China, for example, are both countries where the laws have recently been changed against Christianity. Even in New Zealand, recently you would have heard about the Family First group that was deregistered as a charity because they upheld the traditional view of marriage.

The charity's board said their view is deemed to be not in the public's best interest. Can you believe that? Or even here in Australia, it's growing.

[2 : 3 0] So one lady who appeared on a TV advert with the marriage vote coming up and promoting a no vote, she had threats against her.

She's a GP. She had people phoning her practice, swearing down the phone. And there was even a petition calling for her resignation as a doctor. Now, her view on marriage has nothing to do with her credentials as a GP.

Fortunately, just last week, that petition was cancelled. But it got 5,000 signatures in no time at all. Or just two days ago, a church in Brisbane was hosting an event to talk to parishioners about the marriage vote.

And people, protesters gathered outside to have a go at... In fact, they tried to force their way into the church to disrupt the meeting such that police had to be called.

That's just two days ago in Brisbane. In fact, a number of church leaders, including myself, met with Kevin Andrews last Friday, our federal member, about the postal vote.

[3 : 35] And he confirmed that there is serious unintended consequences. He doesn't think they're intended, but there are serious unintended consequences of a yes vote that we're going to face. He also pointed out that we are ironically being persecuted for upholding the law.

I didn't realise that. The law is marriage between a man and a woman, and yet we're not even allowed to uphold the law. It's ironic, isn't it? But the point is, we had a meeting, and he had to change the location at the last minute in light of what happened in Brisbane and other places.

Persecution is growing. And it's not just the marriage thing. There's also a push on social media to deregister all churches as non-profit organisations as well.

I can't remember. It's tax the churches push, something like that. I can understand why in some cases, like there are some church leaders like Joel Osteen in the US who lives in a mansion worth \$10.5 million.

I mean, that's obscene. But that's the exception. It's not the norm. The point is, there seems to be a growing tide of persecution against Christians, even here in Australia. So what do we do?

[4 : 47] Do we, like some churches, simply give up on God's word? I won't mention any names. Or do we seek to twist God's word? A lecturer at Melbourne's Trinity Theological College has done that and said, well, the Bible, you know, if we understand it rightly, it's actually not condemning homosexuality.

Don't mishear me. We are to love everyone. But there are some views. God has set up sexuality and marriage in a particular way for our good. But people are either ignoring it or twisting it.

And so if we're not going to ignore it or twist it, then what do we do? Well, let's have a look at the vision and see what it says about persecution of God's people. So point one in your outline and verse one in your Bibles.

In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision after the one that had already appeared to me. Now, here we realize that we're actually gone back in time.

So you remember Belshazzar was the arrogant king who had the writing on the wall back in chapter five. And so as we come to chapter eight here, we've gone back in time to about seven years before chapter five to the writing on the wall.

[6 : 01] What's more, we're told that this vision for Daniel is linked with the first vision. So it's still under the reign of King Belshazzar.

So chapter seven, verse one, the first vision was in the first year. And then chapter eight, verse one, the second vision is in the third year. So there's a link occurring under the same king.

More than that, Daniel seems to link the visions together himself. He says in verse one that I had a vision after the one that I had already appeared to me. Now, why is this worth noting?

Well, it's worth noting because we're meant to read this vision with last week's in mind. You see, last week's vision spoke in general terms and gave the big picture of history.

It spoke about different beasts or kingdoms that would rise and fall, and they could represent all sorts of kingdoms in history. We also saw that God was still in control of them and that despite some of these kingdoms opposing God and oppressing God's people, God's king, the son of man who rides on the cloud would rule and God's people would win.

[7 : 13] In other words, God's kingdom would triumph in the end. That's what we saw. Well, this week we moved from beasts that were not named and kingdoms in general to animals which are named and to kingdoms in particular.

So chapter eight is a particular example of chapter seven, in other words. And we move from the big picture of history where God's kingdom triumphs to a particular point in history where God's people will be persecuted.

And it begins with a ram. Verse two. In my vision, I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elan. In the vision, I was beside the Ulai Canal.

I looked up and there before me was a ram with two horns standing beside the canal. And the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other, but grew up later. I watched the ram as it charged towards the west and the north and the south.

No animal could stand against it and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great. So Daniel's vision, he's standing in the city of Susa, which is modern day Iran.

[8 : 23] So the next slide is a map. There's Iran and where the red dot is, that's the city of Susa, which is actually the modern day city of Shush. It's a very quiet city, the city of Shush.

I know, it's terrible. I couldn't help myself. But this is where the city of Susa is. There's even a museum of Susa there today. But Susa was the capital, the capital for the Persian Empire.

And so given Daniel's location here, we're already thinking that the ram represents Persia. And it does. If we take a sneak peek at the interpretation, we'll just jump ahead for a moment.

We'll do this a couple of times. So just turn over the page to verse 20. Just turn over the page to verse 20. And we're told that it does represent Persia. So top of the page, verse 20.

The two horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. Now we know from history that the Persian Empire was made up of two kingdoms, the Medes and the Persians.

[9 : 26] The Persians started off small, but actually grew and became dominant. Like the horn in verse 3 that started off small and then grew to become longer.

And that's why we call it just simply the Persian Empire, because the Persians became the dominant kingdom. But come back with me to verse 4 and notice that this ram is powerful.

See, verse 4, it charges wherever it goes and no animal could stand against it. And none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.

You see, the Persian kingdom is powerful. No one can stand against it until, that is, the goat. You see verse 5? As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

It came towards the two horned ram that I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns.

[10 : 35] The ram was powerless to stand against it, and the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it. And none could rescue the ram from the goat's power.

Here we see that the goat has greater power than the ram, doesn't it? And this horn, as we saw last week, represents a king. And this king, with its nation, the goat, moves quickly across the whole world.

It says without even touching the ground. It's kind of like those cartoons where the character runs so fast you can't see the legs and it doesn't touch the ground. And then in verse 7, he attacks the ram who is now powerless.

And so no one can stand against the goat's power, except one, it seems. See verse 8? The goat became very great, but at the height of its power, the large horn was broken off.

And in its place, four prominent horns grew up towards the four winds of heaven. You see there? At the height of its power, the big horn that had all this power over the ram was broken off.

[11 : 47] But by whom? We're not told. You see, the word power comes up a lot here in these few verses. But it seems there is someone even more powerful than this great horn with all its power.

Such that someone can conquer this horn and break it, judge it. Just like last week where there was someone over the beast, causing them to stand on two feet, if you remember, or telling them what to do, or giving them authority to rule for a time.

So too here, there is someone else who is over these kingdoms. And who is more powerful than even the most powerful king. I wonder who that someone could be.

It's God, just so you know. But while we're not explicitly told who that someone is, we are told who this goat is. So again, if we just jump ahead for a moment to verse 21 across in the next column, towards the top of the page, we read this.

Verse number 21. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece. And the large horn between its eyes is the first king. And the four horns that replace the one that was broken off represent the four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation, but will not have the same power as the big horn.

[13 : 11] Now the goat, we're told, represents Greece and the big horn its first king, who was Alexander the Great. So on the next slide is a bust of him, which is in the British Museum at the moment.

And he conquered the world with great speed. And his power was great. In fact, Alexander never lost a single battle. And he ruled the whole known world at the age of 32.

Makes me wonder what I've been doing with my life. But at the height of his power, he died at 32. And not by another human hand, but by disease.

He was broken off, you see, by someone else's hand, someone else who is more powerful than him. You see, the point is we're subtly being reminded, just as we were last week, that God is more powerful than the most powerful kingdom in the world.

And then Alexander's kingdom was taken over by four of his generals. I believe he had five generals, but one of them got bumped off. And four generals took over and divided up the kingdom rather unequally, actually.

[14 : 23] So on the next slide, I think it is, is a map of his kingdom, which is divided up amongst the four generals, unequally, it seems. The pink was ruled by his general called Cassander.

The green was ruled by Lysimachus. The purple down the bottom near Egypt was ruled by Ptolemies. And the big yellow kingdom in the middle was ruled by Seleucid. So that's what happened in history.

The vision came true in history. That's the ram and the goat part of the vision. But then the vision takes a turn for the worse. At the end of these generals' reign, there is another king who rises up from the solutions, which was that yellow part on the map.

Take a look at verse 9 and how this other king is described. Verse 9, Out of one of them, that is one of the generals, who took over the yellow part of the map, of them came another horn, which started small, but grew in power to the south and to the east and towards the beautiful land.

That's Israel, which the Old Testament describes as a land flowing with milk and honey. And it grew until it reached the host of heaven. And it threw down some of the starry hosts down to earth and trampled on them.

[15 : 37] It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord. It took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord and his sanctuary or temple was thrown down.

Now these verses are a little bit tricky to unpack, but the general thrust is clear. This king starts out small, verse 9, but grows in power such that, verse 11, he will set himself up to be as great as the commander of God's armies, which is actually God.

But he will also attack God. How? Verse 11, He will take away the daily sacrifice from God and he will throw down the temple of God, the sanctuary of God.

What's more, this king will also trample God's people. So in verse 10, he will grow and take on the starry host of heaven, throwing down and trampling on some of them.

The word host in the Old Testament means army. So the starry host refers to God's angelic armies. Now this doesn't mean the king literally goes up to heaven and battles angels and comes down and tramples them.

[16 : 45] Rather, the Bible seems to indicate that angels serve God's people in some way. So by trampling on God's people, it's as though this king is trampling on God's starry host, his angelic armies.

And that's why in verse 12 and 13, the NIV has the Lord's people, even though the word is literally host or army. The point is, he will set himself up as God, he will attack God, and he will trample God's people.

Why? Well, verse 12, because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did.

And the truth, that's God's word, was thrown to the ground. You see, it says it's because of rebellion. It's not clear whose rebellion, whether it's the rebellion of the nations around, that God will use this king to judge, or whether it's the rebellion of some of God's people, or some of the Jews, that God will use this king to judge.

Perhaps it's both. It seems as though God will use this king, and his own rebellious nature, to judge the rebellious nations, and even some rebellious Jews.

[18 : 01] Either way, though, God's temple, and God's faithful people, it seems, will be caught up in this, such that they will be persecuted.

In fact, it says, they will be given over to this king. Do you notice that? Now, immediately, we want to ask, and question God, and say, how can you do that, God?

I mean, we know sin and rebellion are serious, and so God must judge, which is what he seems to be doing with this king. After all, in verse 19, he describes this time as a time of wrath.

But what about God's faithful people? They are caught up in this, too. They are suffering, not in terms of judgment, which is deserved, but they are suffering in terms of persecution, which is undeserved.

And so we want to ask, how can you do that, God? How can you allow that to happen? And while there are answers we can give to that question, it's interesting to note that it's not the questions that the Holy One asks, which brings us to point two and the question.

[19 : 06] Verse 13, then I heard a Holy One speaking, and another Holy One said to him, how long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled? The vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary, and the trampling underfoot.

of the Lord's people. He said to me, it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary will be re-consecrated. You see, the Holy One doesn't ask, how can you let this happen, God?

They ask, how long will this be for, God? God? You see, they don't question God's authority as though he's not allowed to do this, nor do they question God's wisdom as though God has no good reason for allowing this.

But they're often two questions we ask, aren't they? I remember hearing about the persecution of Christians in Egypt, the bombing on Palm Sunday earlier this year, do you remember that?

And then there was the incident on the bus where they, Muslim extremists, pulled the Christians off the bus, around Sinai it was, Sinai Peninsula, and told them to renounce Christ or be shot.

[20 : 15] And some of them were shot. I remember hearing about this and thinking, come on God, how can you allow that to happen? And as I said, there are some answers to that question like, it's part of living in a fallen world, where there is going to be evil and persecution.

Sure, God could come and stop it completely, but that would mean everyone who's not yet a Christian has no more time to repent. And so he's delaying that judgment to give people more opportunities to come to faith.

And perhaps even by seeing the faith of those martyrs, that's one or two possible answers to how God can allow this. And there are others.

But the point here is that this is not the question the holy ones ask, is it? They don't presume to question God's authority or God's wisdom, which are the lessons for us, I suspect.

In fact, they seem to assume persecution is part of living in a fallen world. So they simply ask, how long will it last for? And the answer, 2,300 evenings and warnings.

[21 : 23] Then the temple will be restored or re-consecrated. Now, no one really knows quite what to make of this number. But what it does tell us is that this persecution will be limited.

It will be limited to 2,300 evenings and mornings. In fact, the reason is written as evenings and mornings instead of just days or years, tells us that it won't last beyond one morning.

Not even one more evening than it has to last. God, God, who is more powerful than the most powerful king, who has allowed this evil king to rise up to achieve his purposes, will limit his people's persecution so they won't go beyond what they can cope with.

It's as though God will be watching closely so that this persecution doesn't cause his true people to fall away from faith. It's like my kids when we have a piece of some chocolate cake or something like that, and we're dividing, we're cutting some slices for the cake to give to all of them.

They watch us like a hawk so that their sibling doesn't get the slightest bit more than them. Well, more positively, God will watch that his people don't suffer the slightest bit more persecution than they can handle.

[22 : 41] Not even one morning's worth more. In fact, it also suggests that God will even cut it short. So 2,300 days is about six years and four months.

And you've got to remember in this type of apocalyptic writing, our numbers are often symbolic. And so that time is just short of seven years. The number seven is often the perfect number.

So perhaps it seems God will cut short his perfect judgment, which is deserved on the rebellious for the sake of his faithful people. In fact, the end of chapter seven seems to suggest that, but so does Jesus.

So on the next slide in Matthew 24, Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple again, and he uses this incident that will happen to Israel. He says, so when you see standing in the holy place, the abomination that causes desolation spoken of through the prophet Daniel, and then he goes on to say a number of other things.

And he says, if those days of judgment had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short.

[23 : 54] And so this persecution by this king will not last one moment more than it has to. In fact, it seems to suggest that it will be cut short for the sake of God's faithful people.

It may seem like it lasts forever. When we are suffering, it always seems like it's lasting forever. But from God's perspective of eternity, it will not last forever, and it will not last one moment more than it has to.

In fact, it will be cut short. But who is this king who will persecute God's people and profane God's name? And when will all this happen to God's people? Well, point three, verse 15.

While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man's voice from the Ulay Canal, Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.

As he came near to the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. Son of man, it just means human, he said to me, understand that the vision concerns the time of the end.

[25 : 01] While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. And he said, I'm going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.

Now, when it talks about the appointed time of the end, it doesn't mean the end of time when Jesus returns. It's talking about the end of the kingdoms of Persia and Greece.

When this nasty king rises up, that would be almost 400 years after this vision. So in verses 20 to 22, we have the two kingdoms of the ram and the goats, which we've already read.

They are Persia and Greece. And it's at the end of those kingdoms that this nasty king arises. That's what the vision is really about. You see verse 23. In the latter part of their reign, you know, the end of their reign, the latter part, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce looking king, a master of intrigue will arise.

He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people.

[26 : 16] He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many, and take his stand against the prince of princes, God, it says.

You see, this vision is primarily about what happens when this king rises up and persecutes God's people, and profanes God's name. Verse 23 reminds us that when rebellion has reached its full measure, when the rebels have become wicked, like verse 12, God will allow this fierce king to rise up to judge them.

But again, the problem is, verse 24, God's holy people will be caught up in it. And verse 25, this king will even act like he's God, even take his stand against the prince of princes, which is God.

So, who is this king? After all, the ram and the goat have been named as particular kingdoms in history, and so it's reasonable to assume that this king is a particular king in history.

And given the description here, scholars pretty much unanimously think, it's this next guy on the next slide, I think it is, Antiochus IV. He was a master of intrigue in history.

[27 : 41] He was not supposed to be king, in fact, he was actually a prisoner in Rome. But through political maneuvering and intrigue, he managed to go from prisoner to king.

That's pretty good, isn't it? Talk about starting small, verse 9, and then growing big. And he did wage war, and he did cause devastation. What's more, he also thought himself superior, and set himself up as God.

He changed his name from Antiochus IV to Antiochus Epiphanes. Epiphany means God made clear, or God manifests. So his name was Antiochus God here, God manifest.

He called himself God. And then in verse 25, he took his stand against the prince of princes. So on the next slide, we have some verses from 1 and 2 Maccabees, which are part of Jewish history books.

This is from 1 Maccabees, and it says this, After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the 143rd year, 169 BC. He went up against Israel, and came to Jerusalem with a strong force.

[28 : 45] He arrogantly entered the sanctuary, the temple, and took the golden altar. He erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. And the books of the law that they found, they tore to pieces and burned with fire.

The truth was thrown to the ground, you see. And that desolating sacrilege that's referred to there was a statue of Zeus. And they set it up in the Jewish temple where they were supposed to worship God.

You see, he really set himself against God. And he really persecuted God's people. So on the next slide, we read from 1 Maccabees as well, anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, the Old Testament, or anyone who adhered to the law, the Mosaic law, was condemned to death.

In fact, on one occasion, in just three days, his troops killed 80,000 Jews, men, women, and children. It was a massacre. Such was the persecution of Antiochus.

In fact, he was so fierce that people renamed him. So on the next slide, instead of Antiochus Epiphanes, God manifest, it was Antiochus Epiphanes, the mad.

[29 : 55] So no wonder after Daniel sees this vision, he's feeling sick. Look, see verse 26 and 27. The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given to you is true, but seal it up for it concerns the distant future, 400 years later.

But I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted or literally sick for several days. But then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision.

It was beyond understanding. Now Daniel understood the meaning well enough. Rather, what was beyond understanding was perhaps how Persia or Greece, these insignificant kingdoms during Daniel's time, could possibly rise to become superpowers in the world.

Or more likely, what was beyond understanding for Daniel was, how could God allow such persecution of his people and such profaning of his name to happen? No wonder he was lying on bed, feeling sick for several days.

And yet, he got up and went about the king's business, didn't he? How was he able to do that? Was it simply because this persecution would happen in the distant future and he'd be dead?

[31 : 06] So who cares? Well, no, as we'll see next week, he cares deeply about his people. Rather, I imagine he would have reflected on four things. First, as we saw last week, God is in control.

Even as we're seeing this week, God has power, even over the most powerful king, like Alexander. Second, God will limit this persecution, even cut it short for the sake of his elect.

And that's what happened. There's a guy called Judas Maccabee, which is why the books are called Maccabees, who rose up and fought against Antiochus and freed the people. And the temple was reconstituted.

To this day, Jews celebrate that victory. It's called Hanukkah. That's what they celebrate, the defeat of Antiochus. It was limited. And third, God will judge these evil kings such that there will be justice.

We skipped over the end of verse 25, but it says, yet this king Antiochus will be destroyed, but not by human power. And he was. Antiochus died, not by human hands, but by a rotting disease.

[32 : 15] God's hand, it seems, directly. And fourth, Daniel had this first vision, which reminded him that God's kingdom would triumph in the end.

In the words of our second reading, God is just. He will pay back those who persecute his people, but he will comfort those who have been persecuted when Christ returns. But until then, what are we to do?

Well, you're not to fear and, you know, wait for the shoe to drop, wait for our turn to come. Like Daniel, we had to get on with life, but we are to be prepared for when persecution comes.

And it will one day. If we are lovingly standing for God's truth, it will come, perhaps in small ways. But the Bible says it will come. I mean, if we follow Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again and said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the father except through me. If we stand up for that, then that's going to cause people offense. If we follow Jesus's teaching on sexuality and marriage, that is going to cause offense.

[33 : 20] And while we are to be loving always in our manner, what we believe may sometimes lead to ridicule or worse. And when it does, we had a brace for impact, not with a cushion, but with knowledge that God is in control.

He will limit the persecution. And that he will judge those who persecute us while we will ultimately triumph. Let me finish with a story.

I mentioned Campbell Markham last week, who's the Presbyterian minister in Tasmania, who's fighting an anti-discrimination case this month in the high court, because someone went on his blog back in 2011, six years ago, they got it from, and said he talked about homosexuality and said he was against it.

And so they brought this anti-discrimination suit against him. He wrote an article in this month's Eternity magazine, actually. And in this article, he talks about how this persecution has led to people stopping being his friends, some people leaving his church, and even some of his children, you know, finding it hard with friends at school.

And he says that while his heart aches, if loving Christ and submitting to his teaching means shattered relationships, then we must not be surprised. Jesus said it would sometimes come to that.

[34 : 41] But weep and pray, and leave it in the hands of him who knows best. In other words, trust God who's in control, who has power over all these kingdoms.

Trust God who will limit the persecution. Trust God who will one day judge all evil, and bring us into his triumphant kingdom. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you for this chapter of Daniel, and the message it has for us, which again is timely these days.

Father, we pray that you would help us to love all people, but be willing to stand up for your truth. And when persecution comes our way, whether it's small or big, we pray that you would help us to brace for impact, and not with a cushion, but with the knowledge that you are in control, that you will limit the persecution, and that you will judge and restore your people.

For we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.