

How Long?

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, if you could turn back to Daniel chapter 8, page 891. That would be really useful. And there's a little outline as well for you to follow along.

Well, let me pray for us before we look into this rather intriguing chapter. Father, we pray that as Mark says, when we read your word today, then let us as readers understand and put it into practice, knowing your will.

So, we pray and ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Imagine if a story had no ending. Or if you went to a show or movie which never ends.

Actually, if you're old enough, there was a 1984 movie called Never Ending Story, which actually had a pretty catchy title by the same name, Never Ending Story, you know that one.

But you know, guess what? Even with that story or that movie, it had an ending, right? I know some people in the morning told me, well, there was a sequel. Yes, there was a sequel, but that sequel had an ending as well.

[1 : 0 8] So, endings, I think, appeal to us because, just imagine the frustration if something like a movie did not have an ending. You know, all the drama, all the conflict that you're watching, and you're yearning for this resolution and it never comes.

It would be so frustrating, wouldn't it? And after a while, you'd probably get up and leave because you've had enough. And likewise, when there is turmoil or trials in our life, we too yearn for a resolution, don't we?

And in our waiting, we desperately ask, as Rihanna mentioned earlier, with our brothers and sisters being persecuted, we ask, how long? Now, that's probably how Daniel and his friends felt in exile.

You know, life in a foreign land may have been bearable, comfortable even, but it would not have been satisfactory. They would have longed for home in the promised land and end to subservience to foreign rulers.

And so, it's within this context that Daniel has these dreams and visions that we've been looking at. We looked at one last week from Daniel 7, and this week we're going to look again at another.

[2 : 1 9] Now, this one, we find out in verse 1, happens a little later. For it says, in the third year of King Belshazzar, I, Daniel, had a vision after the one that had already appeared to me.

That was the one in chapter 7. So, it's almost two years or maybe more since that time, and this time, he's not in Babylon either. The vision actually is somewhere else.

For he says, in my vision, I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam. In the vision, I was beside the Ulai Canal. Now, Susa is a fortress city in Persia.

Further along east than Babylon. And as we shall see in the vision in a while, this vision occurs after the fall of Babylon. Now, at first glance, or at first reading, perhaps when Mark read it just now, you would have felt that Daniel 8 shares many parallels with Daniel 7.

And you're right. There's another vision here in verses 3 to 14, and then it's being interpreted, just like in 7, with verses 15 to 27. And then in the end, we find Daniel is again greatly perturbed.

[3 : 31] And so, what I said, a lot of what I said last week applies in this passage as well. And I'll get through some of them as we read again what Daniel saw.

So, he writes, So, here again, like Daniel 7, we have a vision involving animals, and animals with great irresistible power.

The power of this animal, the ram, is likewise only for a time, though, and is soon superseded by another. And we read in verse 5, Now, if you are, a bit of a visual person, I searched Google, and here's a vision of what it may look like.

Pretty nice. But if we keep reading, 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 toward the four winds of heaven.

And so again, I hope you can see how it's similar to Daniel 7, because last week, the fourth beast also had horns that grew out from it. And like Daniel 7, these horns represent individual kings of a larger empire.

[5 : 30] And we read, verse 9, Out of one of them, that is, one of the four horns, came another horn. And this is similar, isn't it, to that little boastful horn in Daniel 7, which started small, but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the beautiful land.

It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. 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 was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

So again, just like Daniel 7, this horn too displaces the horns before it. It grows in power until it opposes God and desecrates the Lord's people and his holy place and all the practices that's in it.

And then at this point, we hear not one, but two voices asking the question that is the title of our sermon today. 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?

[6 : 48] 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. So the question is, how long?

And based on the answer we'll soon read, this question is not about how long before things happen, but how long these things will go on for.

That is, once it started, how long will it go on for? And the answer is an animatic one. He said to me, it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.

We'll look at that phrase a bit more, but for a start, it is plain, isn't it, that the period of desecration will be finite. And that's meant to be good and comforting news.

Last time we looked at it, the phrase was time, times, and half a time. This week, the phrase used, it's 2,300 evenings and mornings.

[7 : 54] 2,300 evenings and mornings before God will eventually grant victory and re-consecrate the temple. Now you're probably thinking, what does this 2,300 evenings and mornings entail?

But before you reach straight away to your calculators or do your sums in your head if you're a genius, I want you to just pause. Don't try and work it out in terms of days and years and whatever and focus instead on the next point which is the variations that I want to point out compared to Daniel 7.

And we begin to see this when we start looking from verse 15. For while I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there stood before me one who looked like a man.

And I heard a man's voice from the Uli calling, Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision. So I take it then that one of the two voices we heard earlier may have been the angel Gabriel.

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

[9 : 05] While he was speaking to me, I was in deep sleep with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. He said, I'm going to tell you what will happen later in the time of Rome because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece and the large horn between its eyes is the first king.

So here then is the first difference in that this vision has the animals specifically tied to historical empires. The ram is Media and Persia.

The longer horn is Persia because it's bigger than the Medes. And then I like how the Greek empire is described as a shaggy goat.

I don't know whether anyone's got Greek ancestry here but it's a shaggy goat. So if Greece is the shaggy goat then the large horn then is widely recognized as Alexander the Great who in and you can see that his face there I don't know whether that's really his face but you can see that the empire that is in red in the short span of 11 or 12 years what he does is that he's come from Greece and conquered all that territory from Greece to India and down south to Egypt.

[10 : 34] Alright? And in verse 22 we also then have further history corresponding for we hear that the horn that replaces the one that was broken off represents four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but not have the same power.

And what actually happened with Alexander was that he suddenly dies in 323 BC and his empire was divided under four commanders into four kingdoms.

And on the next slide you see those four commanders. Lysimachus rules over Thrace and Bithynia that's Asia Minor which is Turkey modern day Turkey. Cassandra rooting over Macedonia and Greece that's where Greece is currently originally the original part of Greece.

And Psyleucos reigns over Syria Babylonia and land to the east. So that's the great territory that spanned across the desert. And then finally we have the fourth kingdom Ptolemy which includes Egypt and then Judea which is the promised land and Arabia Patria which is like the Arabian Peninsula.

Now Seleucus is of the greatest interest to us because it's from him that the horn in verse 9 emerges. It says that he starts small but grew large and is widely seen to be what I mentioned the other week Antiochus Epiphanes the fourth.

[12 : 01] And here's how his actions are described in verse 23. In the latter part of their reign when rebels have become completely wicked a fierce looking king that's him Antiochus 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.

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.

Yet he will be destroyed but not by human power. And history tells us that Antiochus reigned from 175 to 164 BC. That's nearly 200 years or a bit less than that after Alexander's death in 323 BC.

And during this time the rule over Judah had actually transferred from the Ptolemies in the fourth kingdom to the Seleucides the third kingdom.

[13 : 12] And actually when we read the later chapters of Daniel we'll see that the promised land the land of Canaan is actually a battleground for these rival kingdoms. So verses 23 to 25 then have to be understood in tandem with the earlier verses of the dream itself 12 to 24.

So the beautiful land that was described there is actually a reference to Judah. And when he speaks here of destroying the holy people it's against the Jews that Antiochus fights against.

Now we actually have a record of what Antiochus did because in the first and second book of the Maccabees in the Apocrypha were given details of what he did in Jerusalem.

And among other things he openly attacked the temple. He stopped the daily sacrifices from being offered at the temple. Instead he tried to erect a statue of Zeus, the Greek god, to offer profane sacrifices to it.

He burned the Torah and then he massacred the Jews as well. But his offenses against God and his people did not last because the Jewish people actually revolted in what became known as the Maccabean revolt.

[14 : 26] And in 164 BC the temple was re-consecrated. And today if you know you have Jewish friends that celebrate Hanukkah, Hanukkah is celebrated to commemorate this success, this revolt in 164 BC.

Now Antiochus himself dies suddenly in that year 164 and we don't know how but it was not in Jerusalem. So now we do the maths.

If you've been waiting for that, you'll see then that Antiochus' reign of terror lasts about three years, 167 to 164 BC, which ties in with the number 2300 evenings and mornings.

How so? Well, if you divide, as you see on the screen, 2300 by 365, take your calculators out if you want, or trust me, it's approximately 6.3.

Okay? Now you go, that's two times longer than the period, but no, you need to realise that two sacrifices were actually required at the temple each day.

[15 : 34] That's what is meant by the evening and the morning. There's the evening sacrifice and the morning sacrifice. And so if you divide that by two, you get to your three and a bit years. So 2300 was approximately the number of sacrifices that were missed during that time of Antiochus reign.

Now, I think the number is meant to be symbolic. We're not meant to calculate exactly whether it was 2003 sacrifices that were missed. But it's just like the phrase that we had last time, time, times, and half a time.

Next week in chapter 9, or the week after, we'll have the same thing with the number 70, which symbolically corresponded to the length of the exile. So, we're not meant to, you know, the numbers are meant to be symbolic, and they correspond roughly to historical lengths of time, but we're actually meant to think about all of this more generally.

And that is when this question of how long is asked, and this question is often asked by God's people in times of immense suffering, we need to understand what the message, what God's answer then is.

And the message is always the same, whatever the numbers are being used. The message is that God is sovereign, that the time of suffering is always finite, and when the time is right, God's deliverance will come.

[17 : 04] Now, Jesus himself refers to these visions in Daniel, because we read that, didn't we, in Mark chapter 13 today. In that chapter, Mark describes the disciples looking at the temple and admiring how majestic this temple is, and that was at the point when Jesus actually foretold the temple's imminent destruction.

And perplexed, the disciples asked a question similar to Daniel 8, which is in the next slide, verse 13, I think, or verse 12. Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign that they're all about to be fulfilled.

It's verse 4, actually. And Jesus' reply actually comes later on in verse 14. His reply is, when you see the abomination that causes desolation, standing where it does not belong, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

This phrase, abomination that causes desolation, is a direct reference to Daniel chapter 8, to the words, rebellion that causes desecration.

And this phrase actually appears again in Daniel 9, Daniel 11, and Daniel 12. And in fact, if you look at the account in Matthew, it is actually explicitly ascribed to what Daniel has spoken.

[18 : 26] And so, if you think about it then, Jesus did not consider the vision of Daniel 8 to be fully exhausted by the events of Antiochus.

We can see that Daniel 8 fits historically with Antiochus because it happened, but Jesus did not think that that was the end of it because Antiochus came before Jesus, didn't he?

More than 160 years before that. Instead, Jesus considered that Daniel 8 was still relevant for events that were to come after his first coming.

So, the way to think about Daniel 8 then is to look again at verse 17 where the angel Gabriel says, Son of man, understand that the vision concerns, and this is the phrase that we are going to look at, the time of the end.

He actually repeats this again in verse 19 where he says, I'm going to tell you what will happen later in the time of the end because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.

[19 : 30] Same phrase. So, what does this phrase mean? Well, let me illustrate again with movies. Now, sometimes at the end of a movie as the credits roll, you get that final screen pop up, don't you?

And what does it say? The end. But is it really the end if the movie is part of a sequel or an episode in, let's say, a K-drama or something?

It's not, is it? It's just the end of that episode or that sequel. And so, likewise, the end Gabriel speaks of here is not the very end of time, that is, it's not the second coming of Jesus, but the time of the end of each episode of Abomination.

And so, even though the details of Daniel 8 can tie specifically to Antiochus, it also serves as a pattern for the time of each end, that every time a little horn is allowed to arise in history by God's will, there will come an end to that time where God puts them away.

And each time, the comfort of Daniel 8 and the comfort of Daniel generally is the same. God will protect and deliver his people.

[20 : 54] the end will come even if it's not the end of the suffering in history. In fact, very soon after Jesus spoke these words in Mark 13, Jerusalem was besieged and the temple was destroyed in AD 70.

That time, the abomination was done by the Romans. And some of the detail in Mark 13 actually fits that period. And so, when Mark says, let the reader understand, in verse 14, he's sort of doing a little side-eye kind of thing, where those readers living after AD 70, they'll read those words and then they'll look at each other and they'll go, yeah, I do understand, because as I look up, I see that the temple has been destroyed.

And you know, since then, I think there have been many other such times where there have been other ends. So, the Holocaust of World War II is perhaps one such example.

But God mercifully brought that to an end, didn't he? Some people have wondered whether what they're now seeing in the Middle East is another such time.

Well, I don't know. Time will tell, wouldn't it? And of course, now that Jesus has come, God's people are not just the Jews, are they?

[22 : 18] these visions now can be applied to the church because after all, Paul calls the church the temple of the Holy Spirit.

We are God's temple, aren't we, collectively? And so when Christians are persecuted, God's temple is being attacked. And the promise of Daniel is that this too will be brought to an end by God at some stage.

And this time, it's not just only in Jerusalem, but wherever God's people is, God will bring it to an end in this world. So I think when we look at passages like Daniel 8, we don't need to be too caught up in trying to predict exactly how these passages will be fulfilled in history.

Like when will the second coming be? And try and find out and match all those details. That's not the purpose of these visions. And the interpretation is not given to us in order to help us to work these things out.

Because after all, if you look at Daniel's own reaction in verse 26, even he was confused, wasn't he? In verse 26, it says, the vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision for it concerns the distant future.

[23 : 36] I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision. It was beyond understanding.

So Daniel didn't get it, did he? He was none the wiser, even though he was given wisdom beyond all the other people in the court to interpret dreams. And so if it's beyond Daniel, then surely it is beyond us as well.

So yes, the very end will come one day. There will be that one final horn in history, and then Christ will come again for our final deliverance, but the exact details of when and how that will occur, God has really kept to himself for now.

Therefore, the Bible teaches us not to prepare for this time by just trying to work out when exactly this will happen. Let's not be distracted by all that.

And I know if you search on the internet, you can find all sorts of theories. Don't be distracted by that. Instead, these visions are given to us to comfort us to remember that God has already promised victory.

[24 : 51] That first, and most importantly, Jesus has already died for us on the cross, so that the ultimate victory has already been won. That is the victory that really matters in the end, the one of being delivered from something more terrible than little horns in history, deliverance from our sin, deliverance from judgment and death.

Because after all, Jesus is the true temple, isn't it? He is the ultimate sacrifice. He's the one that rulers tried to destroy and desecrate, but whom God restored and reconsecrated.

How? By raising him from the dead. That victory has already been won, even though for a time we may still go through suffering in this life. And so in the meantime, instead of worrying and fearing, our instruction is to hold fast to God's promises.

God will deliver. Evil will pass. The little horns will not prevail. But we need to stand firm in the Lord. We need to not allow our hearts to grow cold.

And then look what Daniel did. Because even though he was appalled by the vision, he got up. And went about the king's business. In other words, he went back to work.

[26 : 13] Right? He didn't go into hiding. He was not a doomsday prepper. He didn't disengage from life on earth. And so we too need to go about the king's business.

But on top of our earthly bosses, the king that I'm really talking about is the one true king that we have, the Lord Jesus. And his business is actually the most important thing that we need to attend to.

His business is for us to serve him as his faithful witnesses, testifying to his rule in word and deed, by being godly, loving, caring for each other, sharing the good news with others, telling them that Jesus has already won the ultimate victory, and yes, warning them also that the end will come when every wrong will be judged, including our wrong, and the only way to secure victory is to put our trust in Jesus, to be saved from our sin.

And in the meantime, there may be more horns that will rise up, things may get worse, you may personally get impacted, and you might start to worry for your future, but please, God has promised, everything is in his hands, so let's not lose heart.

He wouldn't delay deliverance one day longer than is necessary. 2,300 evenings and mornings, not 2,301.

[27 : 46] And when the time is right, God will act, and his son Jesus will finally return. We can be sure of that. Let's pray.

Father, we pray for your mercy to be upon those who are currently suffering from persecution and oppression. Please give them the strength, and may their appointed time be short.

Help them to stand firm, to understand the times, and to know that final deliverance is coming. Help us, your people, to see in your son Jesus the final victory that has been won on the cross.

Teach us to fix our hope in him until the end of our days. And so we pray, Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus. In his precious name we ask.

Amen. Amen.