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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 7

Illustration

Forced perspective is where two objects separated by some distance appear to be



next to each other. In prophetic discourses, “forced perspective” is called Dual Fulfillment. This is where from the perspective of the prophet two future events separated by some time appear to be simultaneous and so announced as one. For example we read of the sign of deliverance that God would give to Ahaz:

Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”



To Ahaz the prophecy was of a soon-to-be-born child whose growth and maturation would signal the cessation of a national threat. Yet we know that this prophesy actually had two referents in mind, speaking of Jesus’ birth Matthew wrote this:

Matthew 1:22-23, “Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah] might be fulfilled, saying, ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’”

Truly, the promise that God gave to Isaiah had a dual fulfillment!

It is important that we keep this prophetic tool in mind. For as we’ll see, what Daniel gave to his generation as a word of encouragement in this and the coming chapters in actuality had two reference points in mind. Daniel was the first prophet to write as an exile, in exile, for a people in exile. As such, he penned this prophecy to answer two questions: When the pain and difficulties of this life come crashing in on you: What is the servant of Christ to do? What is there to encourage them?

As to the first question, chapter 1 would say this: Purpose within yourself to seek the Lord... honor the Lord... worship the Lord... trust the Lord! As we have seen, that is a major theme of this book.

As to the second question, chapters 2-12 are Daniel’s answer, of which we’ve seen six thus far: “Be Encouraged...”

- *Your God is Great and so Rules Kings and Nations, Daniel 2.”*
- *Your God is Holy and therefore has a Plan that is Beyond your Ability to Understand, Daniel 3.”*
- *Your God Reigns and so Holds the Heart of the King in His Hands, Daniel 4.”*
- *Your God is Jealous and so will not allow Himself- and so the Believer- to be Mocked, Daniel 5.”*
- *Your God’s Way is Infallible and so makes no Mistakes when it comes to the Child of God, Daniel 6.”*
- *In the end, God’s People Win, Daniel 7.”*

We have before us a seventh word of exhortation from chapter 8: *Be Sobered! Until the End, God's Kingdom will Suffer Violence!*

Daniel 8:1, "In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously."

There are two things that stand out here. First, the time indicator — "the third year of the reign of Belshazzar." This places the prophecy around 550/548 BC depending on the commentary. That places this prophetic vision in Daniel's life when he was in his late 60s/early 70s. Secondly, the statement — "subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously" joins this chapter to the one before indicating that the content of this vision is somehow related to that of chapter 7.

The Vision

Daniel 8:2, "And I looked in the vision, and it came about while I was looking, that I was in the citadel [lit. "the fortress"] of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision, and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal."

Recall that Daniel received this vision in Babylon. Yet in the prophetic dream, he was transported to the ancient capital of Elam- Susa- which eventually would become one of the greatest cities of the Persian empire (Nehemiah 1:1). In the vision, Daniel found himself "beside the Ulai Canal" which was a massive, man-made water-way on which Alexander the Great eventually would sail his fleet.

Daniel 8:3, 5, "Then I lifted my gaze and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns *were* long, but one *was* longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last... While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground [the idea is a swift spread]; and the goat *had* a conspicuous horn between his eyes."



As we'll see in vv. 20-26, the ram here was the Medo-Persian Empire¹ which ruthlessly conquered the ancient world.

Daniel 8:4, "I saw the ram butting westward [Babylonia, Syria, and Asia Minor], northward [Armenia and the area of the Caspian Sea], and southward [Africa], and no *other* beasts could stand before him, nor was there anyone to rescue from his power; but he did as he pleased and magnified *himself*."

Yet soon after, God would raise up another kingdom, here pictured as "a goat," which would vanquish the ram so as to destroy it (vv. 6-7), we are talking here about Greece. This goat would have "a conspicuous horn" in the middle of its forehead — Alexander the Great — one of the greatest commanders to have ever lived! Referencing Alexander, the text continues:

Daniel 8:8, "Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven."

Those of you who know your history, Alexander's life was a "flash in the pan"- here today and gone tomorrow! He became the general of his late-father's army at the age of 21 and proceeded to conquer the world virtually by the age of 26. On the way home from his conquest, he died suddenly at the age of 33 in Babylon! His kingdom was divided between four prominent generals in Alexander's army: Seleucus, Ptolemy, Antigonus, and Antipater- which is why we read, "...and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven." Now focusing on one horn — the Seleucid dynasty — the prophecy continues:

Daniel 8:9-11, "And out of one of them came forth a rather small horn² [Antiochus Epiphanes] which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful *Land* [that is, the Promised Land]. And it grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth [though the primary reference for "host" in Scripture are the stars (Deuteronomy 17:3), here the term clearly is used of the many rival kings who were brutally killed at the beginning of Aniochus' reign (cf. Isaiah 24:21 and its use of "hosts" in reference to kings)], and it trampled them down. It even magnified *itself* to be equal with the Commander of the host [that is, God]; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary [lit. the place of His abode- which was the temple] was thrown down."

We'll talk more about Antiochus in a bit. For now recognize that Daniel received a vision of a horrible era in Judean history when the people of God underwent severe persecution. And yet, it wasn't just the people of God. The Lord was the object of the attacks at this time, as is always the case. When Paul was attacking Christians, Jesus confronted him with the words:

Acts 9:4, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

That is what would happen during this era of persecution. Antiochus would focus his attack against God and so His temple such that His sacrifices and service would be suspended/impeded for some time.

Daniel 8:13-14, "Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, 'How long will the vision *about* the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?' And he said to me, 'For 2,300 evenings *and* mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored.'"

This gives the duration of the persecution specifically referenced here! Addressing the morning and evening sacrifices, it is said that 2,300 of these sacrifices would be missed until the temple and its service would be restored that roughly breaks down to 3 1/2 years (cf. Daniel 7:25), the

time the temple lay in ruin before Mattathias cleansed it at the start of the Maccabean revolt!

I have purposefully skipped over a major chunk of history in which God's people were attacked and mercilessly persecuted, simply because Daniel himself is being intentionally vague here (he'll return to this history in full in the vision of chapters 11-12 where we'll address this era). For now understand that the vision before us is one of treachery and horror! What was vaguely referenced in chapter 7 is highlighted; the future for God's people was going to be extremely difficult.

From this we conclude that truly, this world is not a friend of grace to help us on our way. It is both a veil of tears in which God has deigned to perfect us through suffering as well as a battle ground in which Satan endeavors to attack the servants of God (Revelation 12)! And yet with this, we behold a glorious contrast.

A Glorious Contrast

Daniel 8:15-16, "And it came about when I, Daniel, had seen the vision, that I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man. And I heard the voice of a man between *the banks of Ulai*, and he called out and said, 'Gabriel, give this *man* an understanding of the vision.'"

Daniel is the only Old Testament book in which angels are named (cf. Michael in 10:13). Here the particular angel called upon to help Daniel was Gabriel, who would explain the meaning of the vision, but not before Daniel would be traumatized.

Daniel 8:17-18, "So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, 'Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end.' Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright."

This constitutes an important message for the people of God! You know what truly is awesome? It is not the horrible sufferings and persecutions to which God's people have been and continue to be subjected; it is coming into contact with the Eternal! Family of God, don't miss it, we have more in common with an amoeba than we do with God! Accordingly, the universal response on the part of man when confronted with the Eternal is that of reverence and awe (like we see in Daniel)!

Yet, today in our religion we have downgraded God's glory and greatness. In the words of Psalm 50:21b, we have thought of God as "much like ourselves." What a mistake!

This passage serves as an important rebuke to any and all who might be intimidated by man or anything else in this world. When Daniel first heard of the suffering which God's people would undergo in chapter 7, he was rightly burdened. Yet here we do not read of that burden (though no doubt it continued). Rather what burdened Daniel and so shook him to the core was

standing in the presence NOT of God, BUT of an angel! After interacting with the eternal, Daniel wrote this:

Daniel 8:27, "Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up *again* and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded [desolated, torn to pieces] at the vision, and there was none to explain *it*."

If an angel could evoke such reverence, how much more the Lord! So yes, the vision here is heavy! But listen, that which must move Daniel's hearers and that which must move us in life is NOT the momentary and light afflictions of this world, BUT the glory and grandeur of God! With this, we are brought to the explanation of the vision.

The Vision Explained

Daniel 8: 20-22, "The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. And the shaggy goat *represents* the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. And the broken *horn* and the four *horns that* arose in its place *represent* four kingdoms *which* will arise from *his* nation, although not with his power."

If there was any question as to what the vision here meant, this passage clears it up. Again, the "Ram with the two horns" represented the Medo/Persian Empire. The "Goat" represented united Greece whose first king was Alexander the Great.³ And then, upon Alexander's death, the kingdom would be divided amongst four of his generals:⁴

- Seleucus (Palestine, Syria, Asia, the east).
- Ptolemy (Egypt and Palestine)
- Antigonus (Asia Minor).
- Antipater (Macedonia and Thrace).

Focusing on the Seleucid empire, the text continues:

Daniel 8:23-24a, "And in the latter period of their rule, when the transgressors have run *their course*, a king will arise insolent and skilled in intrigue. And his power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power..."

Again, there is little question that this is referring to Antiochus Epiphanes- an extremely evil and wicked leader who was quite hostile toward the people of God. Let me give you some background.

- In 169 BC, Antiochus IV (who called himself *Theos Epiphanes*- lit., "God-Incarnate") travelled to Jerusalem where he replaced the high priest with a man of his own choosing. He then invaded Egypt, and while there a rumor of his death circulated

among the Jews (much to their joy). Not surprisingly efforts were made to reinstate the genuine high priest whom Antiochus deposed.

- Yet Antiochus wasn't dead! When he received word Jerusalem was revolting against the high priest he installed, he accused the Jewish people of rebellion, savagely attacked and sacked Jerusalem, and executed tens of thousands of its inhabitants (it is said that 40,000 people were executed within the space of three days)! He then travelled back to Jerusalem where he entered the holy of holies in the temple. There he sacrificed a pig on the altar of burnt offering, defiled the temple precincts, took the sacred furniture, and re-established Menelaus as high priest.
- This understandably resulted in major rebellion on the part of the Jews to which Antiochus reacted with a religious persecution of unprecedented bitterness! More than 20,000 of his soldiers massacred the Jews assembled for worship on a Sabbath day. Sabbath-keeping and the practice of circumcision were forbidden under the pain of death. Unclean meat was mandatory fare, and the Sabbath and other feast days were profaned. Pagan sacrifices and prostitution were established in the Temple. And a statue of Zeus was placed in the temple to which human sacrifices were offered on the altar!

We will talk more about this when we get to Daniel 10-11 for it once again is referenced there. For now, what is the point we ought to take from this passage? What is God giving His people here to sober them as they endeavored to serve Him in the exile?

As we begin deriving the point, I want to draw your attention to the frequent references in this chapter to the trials and difficulties of God's people as a "set period." Gabriel speaking to Daniel said this:

Daniel 8:17b, "...but he said to me, 'Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end.'"

Furthermore, he said this:

Daniel 8:19, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for *it* pertains to the appointed time of the end."

Daniel 8:26, "And the vision of the evenings and mornings which has been told is true; but keep the vision secret, for *it* pertains to many days *in* the future."

Commentators are quick to point out that Daniel is using prophetic language in reference NOT to the end time per se, BUT to the close of the era which Daniel is referencing in this chapter—the era of the Persians and the Greeks. In this context, notice that Daniel predicts that throughout the era referenced here, God's people would suffer at the hands of evil rulers and people (n.b., 7:5, 6, 7, 19, 21, 23, 25; 8:4). However, there would be an increasing level of persecution and suffering with Antiochus Epiphanes.

Daniel 8:24-25a, “And his power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power, And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform *his will*; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people. And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; and he will magnify *himself* in his heart, and he will destroy many while *they are* at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes...”

Truly, accompanying the reign and rule of Antiochus would be a culmination of persecution directed against God and His people resulting in the “Abomination of Desolation” (Daniel 11:31) specifically the setting up of an altar to Zeus on the mercy seat where pigs and human sacrifice were offered!

Now we know that prophetic literature can contain dual fulfillment, which is also the case here. Speaking of the last days, Christ said this:

Matthew 24:15-16, “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

In other words, while it is clear that Daniel is writing about the era of Judean history under the Persians and the Greeks, nevertheless on account of Dual Fulfillment, we know this is also talking about the inter-adventual age in which we live! That means that what is promised/forewarned here, we take as directly applicable to us! So in this vision (Daniel 8) Daniel saw a horrible future that awaited God’s people under Antiochus Epiphanes! Yet as this chapter is interdependent upon Daniel 7, we understand that there remains a horrible future for the people of God under the many anti-Christ’s that would arise in our age culminating in the 11th horn of Daniel 7:8- the man of lawlessness, the anti-Christ!

Toward that end, notice with me the nature of the opposition referenced in this passage- opposition which on account of dual fulfillment will confront us as well. Last week we saw the first characteristic of this battle- Satan is all about “wearing us down” (7:25)! In closing, let’s consider five more characteristics of Satan’s strategy. Daniel speaking of the horn wrote this:

Daniel 8:11, 13, “It even magnified *itself* to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him [a reference to the morning and evening sacrifices], and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down... Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, ‘How long will the vision *about* the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?’”

This most certainly wasn’t the first organized attack on Biblical worship (for that we go to the Tower of Babel). However, what we read indicates a major objective in Satan’s war with God. He is after God’s worship. And because few would willingly give themselves to his service, one of Satan’s objectives therefore is the corruption of true worship.

We've seen this again and again throughout our study of the prophets. During this era, Baalism captured the heart and minds of many of God's people such that the sanctuary of God literally was thrown down! And today the assault continues as Baalism truly has become a large part of our culture, and so the worship practices and preferences of God's people.

How does Baalism manifest itself today? It begins by confusing emotion with genuine worship such that attaining a certain feeling is the chief end of worship. That, in its core, is Baalism. If you in your worship are moved such that you become emotional, there is nothing wrong with that! But if you make attaining an emotional feeling the object of your worship, that is Baalism. Augustine hit is on the head when he wrote speaking of singing in the context of worship:

I am inclined- though I pronounce no irrevocable opinion on the subject- to approve of the use of singing in the church, so that by the delights of the ear the weaker minds may be stimulated to a devotional mood. Yet when it happens that I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned wickedly, and then I would rather not have heard the singing. (Hippo, 2008, p. 313)

Today, the focus seems to be on being moved by the singing/service/preaching that is Baalism at its core! May God give us the grace to fight against this stratagem! Yet there are other areas where we are under attack today, still speaking about the horn, Daniel writes:

Daniel 8:12, "And on account of transgression the host will be given over *to the horn* along with the regular sacrifice;⁵ and it will fling truth to the ground and perform *its will* and prosper."

It is the latter part that details a second form of persecution directed against God and His people- throwing truth to the ground (which is another way of saying, "It will be dragged through the mud!") Brothers and sister, Satan is the father of lies (Genesis 3:13; 1 Timothy 2:14; Revelation 12:9) and so any activity in which he is involved will undoubtedly involve lies and falsehood. Such would be the spirit of the age that would confront God's people during the Persian/Greek era. And such is the spirit of the age in which we live! Paul wrote this describing the epitome of what the non-believer does in his sin:

Romans 1:25 "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Not surprisingly, there is an all-out assault on truth today. And any who would stand in the gap and dare to speak the truth will be persecuted and hated. I dare you, in an open forum, to proclaim that homosexuality is a deviant activity and a sin. Yet it is! According to God's word (Romans 1:24, 26-27) it is vile! Yet if you proclaim that message you will be attacked! If you say evolution is not a science but a religion (which it is), you will be attacked. If you say premarital sex is an egregious sin you'll be mocked. If you say you shouldn't work or sport on Sunday, you'll be laughed at. If you say the Bible is true and ought to be that upon which we base our lives, you'll be branded as ignorant. Over 2,500 years ago God sought to encourage His people

by warning them that such attacks were coming. And He continues this encouragement today in His word. Notice a third form of attack, is that Christians are attacked. Daniel speaking of Antiochus wrote:

Daniel 8:24, “And his power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power, and he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform *his will*; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people.”

This speaks of horrible persecution directed against the people of God, a persecution I detailed earlier. Yet notice, this persecution would not be leveled simply against the weak, disenfranchised, or poor. It would reach every level of society where a follower of God dwelt.

Daniel 8:25b, “...and he will magnify *himself* in his heart, and he will destroy many while *they are* at ease...”

Even the powerful and wealthy who had the means to “be at ease” would be attacked! This persecution continues up to the present. We are fortunate that we don’t live in a land where the servants of God are specially targeted for attack; yet such systematic persecution is going on in our world today in the Near East, the Arab world, India, Africa, China, etc... If we aren’t being persecuted, we need to pray! Notice another form of persecution is that deceit is promoted.

Daniel 8:25a, “And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence...”-

This is similar to v. 12 where we saw that one of Satan’s tactics is to attack truth. Yet there is a difference here. It is one thing to “cast truth to the ground”; yet it is quite another to “cause deceit to succeed.”

During the Maccabean era, falsehood and deceit reigned supreme. And so it is in our day as well. For example, it is not enough that we can’t proclaim truth; we live in an age where we must believe a lie! Again, think of homosexuality. Twenty or thirty years ago you could say, “Homosexuality is a sin, but we love the sinner!” Today we must all believe that it is a loving/healthy relationship. If we don’t, we are branded as homophobic. This is but a small tip of a great iceberg. Satan wants our minds! He can’t live in a world where Christian thought prevails. As a result, truth is attacked and deceit is exalted!

Years ago an ex-drug lord from a communist country in South America spoke at a seminary chapel. He spoke of the horrible crimes of torture, abuse, rape, murder, and the like that he committed, he was free at the time to live in the land. But the moment he became a Christian, he was put in prison. He said, “The most dangerous threat to a communistic society is thought. Communism doesn’t want their people to think. That is why I was put in prison. Christianity made me a thinker! And communism can’t endure that!”

There is yet a final area of persecution that God warns us about here and which constitutes the chief form of attack that we will suffer at any place in any time.

Daniel 8:25c, "...he will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency."

In keeping with what we saw last week from Revelation 12, Satan's passion is to attack the Christian in place of attacking Christ. See, our world hates Christ which is why it hates us! You'd think morally upright individuals would be the coveted prize of any nation- but not if they love Christ. If they love Christ they must go, because Christ must go!

With this we are brought to a seventh word of exhortation to the man, woman, or child who have become aliens and strangers on account of Christ. *Be Sober! Until the End, God's Kingdom will Suffer Violence, Daniel 8.*

And what are we to do with this? Bury our head in the sand? Weep and lament? NO! Engage in the battle- which has three fronts!

2 Corinthians 10:3-6, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God [Engaging the Culture], and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ [Personal Holiness and Maturation], and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete [Biblical Fellowship]."

God does love us and does have a wonderful plan for our life, a plan which for some of us might even start on this side of the grave. But let us not be deceived! We are in a battle and the stakes are great! Let us not shrink back! But with the zeal and vigor that comes from knowing the Lord, let us "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12)!

Bibliography

Hippo, A. o. (2008). *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Minneapolis, MN: Filiquarian Publishing, LLC.

End Notes

¹ It is important to note that the Medes and the Persians at one time were distinct and so separate tribes which eventually would join together to form the Medo-Persian empire which conquered the ancient world. Cyrus, a latter rule and so the second horn of Daniel's vision, was Persian which is why many no longer refer to it as the Medo-Persian empire, just the Persian empire (the Persian element was the larger and more dominant people). However and again, it is important to note that at the beginning it really was a conjoining of two groups!

² This is not the little horn of Daniel 7:8- the anti-Christ. However, both horns no doubt were inspired by the same being, the devil.

³ Recall that prior to Alexander, Greece was NOT a unified nation, BUT a collection of city-states. Alexander would unify it and so serve as its first king.

⁴ Alexander had two heirs/sons, Alexander and Herakles. Yet as it oft-time occurred in the ancient world, both were murdered that they might not sit on the throne!

⁵ This part of the Hebrew is so enigmatic that it is difficult to understand, lit., "the host/army? was given over to it"- whatever that means.

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About the Preacher

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