

# Gabriel's Interpretation

Bible Background • DANIEL 8

Printed Text • DANIEL 8:19–26 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 91:1–12

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLAIN why good decisions yield good outcomes; RECALL a time when we needed help from others; and VISUALIZE a better future in God.

## In Focus

The reality of Andre's 40th birthday was far worse than the one he envisioned. By now, he thought he'd be married, settled financially, and established in a career. Instead, he was between women and jobs and living paycheck to paycheck.

"Man, how did I get here?" he asked his friend Anthony.

"That's life. On one hand, it goes by so slow it seems like you have time to get things together. Then again, it goes so fast you can hardly keep up. Then you wake up at 40 and realize you're at the same spot you were at 20."

"Exactly. I am ashamed to be 40 and have nothing to show for it," Andre said.

"It's not too late; you just turned 40 today. You have plenty of time to change things."

"What am I going to do this year that I haven't done in the 39 before it?"

"That's the exact question you should be asking. I'm just the wrong person to pose it to," Anthony said. "Go to a career counselor, a therapist, or even your pastor. If you want things to be different, you gotta do different things."

Sometimes it's hard to know what to expect when we are overwhelmed and confused. In today's lesson, we will see how Gabriel helped Daniel understand his vision.

## Keep In Mind

"And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days" (Daniel 8:26, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Indignation** (Daniel 8:19) za'am (Heb.) — Anger, rage, or wrath.

**B. Dark sentences** (v. 23) chiydah (Heb.) — Enigmatic statement or question; perplexing statement.

## Say It Correctly

**Belshazzar.** behl-SHAZ-er

**Antiochus.** an-TAI-uh-kuhs

**Epiphanes.** Eh-PIHF-uh-neeZ

**Maccabeus.** Mak-uh-BEE-us

**Ptolemy.** TAH-luh-mee

**Seleucus.** Seh-LOO-kuhs

## KJV

**Daniel 8:19** And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be.

20 The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.

21 And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.

22 Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

24 And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.

25 And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

26 And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days.

## NLT

**Daniel 8:19** Then he said, "I am here to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath. What you have seen pertains to the very end of time.

20 The two-horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia.

21 The shaggy male goat represents the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes represents the first king of the Greek Empire.

22 The four prominent horns that replaced the one large horn show that the Greek Empire will break into four kingdoms, but none as great as the first.

23 "At the end of their rule, when their sin is at its height, a fierce king, a master of intrigue, will rise to power.

24 He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause a shocking amount of destruction and succeed in everything he does. He will destroy powerful leaders and devastate the holy people.

25 He will be a master of deception and will become arrogant; he will destroy many without warning. He will even take on the Prince of princes in battle, but he will be broken, though not by human power.

26 "This vision about the 2,300 evenings and mornings is true. But none of these things will happen for a long time, so keep this vision a secret."

## The People, Places, and Times

**Gabriel.** He was an angel who was sent by God to deliver messages. He announced the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and the birth of Jesus to Mary. In our text, he was sent to Daniel to explain his visions. Media and Persia. The ram in Daniel's vision represents the Medo-Persian Empire. Its two horns represent Kings Darius and Cyrus. The Persians overthrew Media under Cyrus in 558 B.C. and unlike other conquests, the Medes were appointed to stations of high honor and importance. The two nations seemed blended into one.

## Background

After Daniel's vision of the four beasts, he sees another. This vision is about a ram, a goat, and a little horn. The ram had two horns on his head, one higher than the other, and was standing by the river. He pushed northward, southward, and westward and no other animal could defeat him. As Daniel was considering the vision of the ram, a goat with one horn came from the West and charged the ram. He tore the ram's two horns, making it powerless and defeating it. The goat lost his one horn and four horns grew in its place. Out of one of the four, a little horn grew toward heaven and cast down some of the angelic host. Daniel was baffled by the vision and God sent the angel Gabriel to interpret it.

### At-A-Glance

1. God Sends Daniel the Help That He Needs (Daniel 8:19–22)
2. God Can and Does Interpret Dreams (vv. 23–26)

## In Depth

### 1. God Sends Daniel the Help That He Needs (Daniel 8:19–22)

Daniel fell on his face when Gabriel arrived, thinking his end had come. But, Gabriel stood him upright and explained that Daniel's vision foretold what should happen at the end times (eschatology) of the world. With Gabriel's help, Daniel understood that the vision was one of comfort to those who live in calamitous times knowing that there should be an end to them. Gabriel explained that the ram's two horns are the princes of Media and Persia. The horn that grew up first was shorter than the second one. The second and longest horn represented the kingdom of Persia, which rose last and was more eminent than Media. With its horns, the ram charged westward (toward Babylon, Syria, Greece, and Asia), northward (toward the Lydians, Armenians, and Scythians), and southward (toward Arabia, Ethiopia, and Egypt). The Persians launched attacks against all these nations to enlarge their dominion. The Persian Empire became so great that no one could withstand it, as the ram had in the vision.

The goat Daniel saw coming from the West represents Greece, and the horn between its eyes was Alexander the Great. In the vision, the goat did not touch the ground, and Gabriel explained that Alexander the Great had moved so lightly that he met with little or no opposition. In effect, he went to conquer the world. It is said that Alexander the Great pushed his conquests so fast and with so much fury that no one had courage enough to stand against him. He attacked Persia with three magnificent battles, killing more than 600,000 men and gaining absolute control of the Persian Empire. In the vision, the goat trampled the ram and broke its two horns.

Just as soon as the goat had become great, his horn broke and grew into four other horns. Alexander's kingdom divided itself into four parts, the kingdoms of Syria, Egypt, Asia, and Greece. But a small horn grew out of the four, and became persecutor of the church and the people of God.

### 2. God Can and Does Interpret Dreams (vv. 23–26)

Verses 23–25 describe the characteristics and the personality of the "small horn," which was Antiochus Epiphanes. Matthew Henry writes that Antiochus was seen as small because he "was in his original contemptible; there were others between him and the kingdom ... and (he) had been for some time a hostage and prisoner at Rome, whence he made his escape, and ... got the kingdom" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. IV—Isaiah to Malachi, 1079). He seized Egypt, invaded Persia and Armenia, but ran roughshod over the Jews. According to the vision, Antiochus set himself against God, heaven, and God's people. He forbade the daily sacrifices and set his own image on the temple. It was said he would be destroyed but not by hands. He would not die in war or be killed; he would be given over to the living God. And it was so. When the Jews cast out Antiochus'

image out of the temple, he vowed to make Jerusalem a burial ground. No sooner had he spoken the words, than he was struck with an incurable disease. At first, he continued to threaten the Jews. However as his illness grew worse, he tried to bargain with God to let the Jews worship freely. Finally before his death, he submitted to God and wrote letters of apology for setting himself against the Lord.

Daniel was asked to seal the vision, for it would be more useful to us who live in the last days.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What do the two horns of the ram represent (Daniel 8:20)?
2. What happened to the goat's horn (v. 22)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Sometimes it's hard to see clearly in the midst of so much evil. Daniel received help and support from Gabriel to increase his understanding. Who can we go to for help when our way seems dark?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Communities worsen when people make bad decisions or refuse to make decisions at all. Passivity robs people of the opportunity to ensure a better future for themselves and their families. Daniel was perplexed about the vision he saw, but Gabriel cleared it up for him. What can we learn from today's lesson and what we can do to ensure a better future for the residents of our communities?

### **Application for Activation**

Do you ask others for help or always try to work things out on your own? The person who does not ask for help is either prideful, suffering from low self-esteem, afraid of rejection, or is a glutton for punishment. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not of weakness. Challenge yourself to ask someone to help you with a problem you've dealt with for too long. Consider seeking the counsel of your pastor, parents, financial adviser, friend, or licensed counselor.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Daniel 8:19–26

Introduction:

Two years earlier, in chapter 7, Daniel had a dream about four beasts. Now in the third year of King Belshazzar (approximately 546 B.C.), in chapter 8, he had a vision. Both predict future events. The essence of the vision is similar to the dream in that each involves mysterious animals, and in both instances, the animals refer to kings or kingdoms of the world. Just prior to where our passage begins, three heavenly beings (two “holy ones” and Gabriel) are talking among themselves about the duration of the coming destruction (vv. 13–18). In verse 14 (NLT), one of the angels mentions a period of “2,300 evenings and mornings” until the holy place would be restored. This could refer to six years and 111 days, a total of both mornings and evenings, or three years and 55 days. In this case, “the preponderance of evidence seems to favor the latter interpretation” (Daniel— Minor Prophets, 103). There are similar references in Daniel 7:25; 9:27b; 12:7.

The destruction likely takes place at the Temple in Jerusalem, and refers specifically to the end of sacrifices (8:13), after which the Temple is “cleansed” (v. 14) or re-consecrated, and most agree this was done by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C. It was likely Antiochus IV Epiphanes, ascending to power in 175 B.C., who committed the destruction and desecration in 167 B.C. (vv. 15–18). Regarding verses 23-25, “there is not the slightest doubt that he (Epiphanes) is the one meant, in the description of the ‘small horn,’ whom the angel identifies as a king ‘brazen-faced and skilled in treachery’” (Anchor Bible, the Book of Daniel, 235).

**19 And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be.**

In verse 16, just prior to our passage, Daniel hears but does not see God speaking with the “voice of a man” to the angel Gabriel in what is known as an epiphany, or preincarnate appearance of Christ (also called a “Christophany”). Gabriel is named in only four places in the Scripture (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26), and only Daniel names any angels in the Old Testament (see Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1); Michael is named in the New Testament twice (Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7).

Daniel’s response is to fall prostrate (Daniel 8:17), like John before Jesus in Revelation 1:17, but Gabriel prefers that he stand (Daniel 8:18). The entirety of our passage consists of Gabriel’s message. His words “Understand ... the vision” (v. 17), combined with “I will make thee know” in verse 19, indicate the importance of the messenger to communicate and for Daniel to grasp the message. While there are differences regarding the actual events referenced, commentators agree that these are future events (compare vv. 17, 19, 26).

In verse 19, the term “the indignation” (Heb. za’am, za-AHM) refers to Epiphanes’ destruction of Jerusalem, the butchering of 80,000 Jews, and his vile desecration of the Temple, where he not only erected a statue of Zeus Olympios but sacrificed pigs on the holy altar. For Jews, all these acts were appalling, but none was a greater abomination than blasphemy in their Temple (see also Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Psalm 78:1–4 seems to describe this destruction. Regarding the “time appointed the end,” this term in Daniel 8:19 (Heb. qets, kayts), refers to tempering wisdom, that it “is used not in the eschatological sense but in the Andrerall sense of any ‘end’ ” (Anchor Bible, the Book of Daniel, 232). Compare with Habakkuk 2:3; Daniel 10:14; 11:27, 35.

**20 The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.**

**21 And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.**

**22 Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.**

Just as Daniel's dream was interpreted (7:16), so was his vision. The animals of 8:3, 5 fit their roles in history. The two-horned ram (unified kingdoms of Media and Persia) was no match (8:7) for the one-horned he-goat (kingdom of the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great). As history informs us, Alexander's rise to world domination was meteoric but short-lived as, after only 13 years in power, he died prematurely from a fever at age 32. With Greece's goat king "broken" (8:8, NKJV), his four Andrerals divided his kingdom, but none ever approached Alexander's greatness. These four were: Ptolemy Soter, who ruled Egypt; Cassander, who ruled Macedonia and Greece; Antigonos, who ruled Asia Minor; and Seleucus III, who ruled Syria, Babylonia, and the eastern kingdoms. Seleucus' son, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, headed south to Egypt and east to Persia; during his expansion, he also overtook Judea. Josephus records that it was in the 143rd year after Seleucus I's reign in Syria, following Alexander's death, that Epiphanes entered and crushed Jerusalem, in 168–167 B.C.

**23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.**

**24 And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.**

Epiphanes blasphemously called himself "the Illustrious God," while others called him Epimanes, which means "the Madman." His coins bore the inscription, "God Manifest." Not only did he stop sacrifices at the Temple (8:11), but also, he tried to abolish Judaism by forbidding circumcision and possession of the Hebrew Scriptures by punishment of death. He knew exactly what he was doing when he erected the idolatrous Zeus statue and sacrificed unclean animals on the altar: "Like Nebuchadnezzar, he expected all his subjects to bow down to the great image he had set up" (Daniel— Minor Prophets, 104). As with all such demonized despots in history, their evil anointing comes from Satan, the great deceiver of humanity (Genesis 3:13; John 8:44; Revelation 12:9). His closest followers are always morally corrupt, insolent rebels, without integrity, who enjoy evil. While evil may actually prosper and successfully wreak havoc temporarily, believers through the ages have gained comfort from the Scripture's clear hope that in the end every knee will bow and all will face God's judgment (Romans 14:11; Hebrews 9:27).

**25 And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.**

Epiphanes magnifies himself, like sin itself, which is always self-centered and never Godcentered. His "activity is the embryonic form of an evil that all antichrists perpetrate in one form or another" (Daniel, Communicator's Commentary, 173). He destroys through peace because he is a master of treachery and deception, like a master con artist. Satan and his ilk are known to transform themselves into angels of light or messengers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13–15), which in this use in the Greek means "assuming a disguise." This is not the same Greek word as in Romans 12:2 (NIV), "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Gk. metamorphoo, met-am-or-FO-o), which means to be changed or transfigured (as was Jesus in Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2; see also 2 Corinthians 3:18), not merely disguised. Epiphanes defies God, exactly as Lucifer did (Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:16-19), and for that he pays the ultimate price, and is broken. He from an "attack of worms on his bowels, accompanied by a revolting stench," after which he died, "imploring the God of Israel to spare his life"

(Daniel—Minor Prophets, 105). Ferguson expands the judgment aspect: “God’s destruction of Antiochus will be a foretaste of His final destruction of the Antichrist...What is true of this Antichrist is true of all antichrists. It will also be true of the final Antichrist” (Daniel, Communicator’s Commentary, 176).

**26 And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days.**

A statement is not true because it is in Scripture, but it is in Scripture because it is true. Similarly, God told Habakkuk in a vision that justice, detailed in a series of woes, would happen at the appointed time (Habakkuk 2:2–4). In this sense, any future time appointed by God could be an “end” (Daniel 8:17); therefore, certainly it would be true in the prophetic eschatological “end times” sense (see Daniel 10:14 referring to “latter days”; also Daniel 11:27, 35). In fact, it is reasonable that we consider the visions of Daniel, Habakkuk and others as verifiable descriptions of end times: “There is no speculation that these are future, end times events” (Daniel, 124).

New Testament believers are familiar with God’s appointed times from incidents when Jesus told those He healed not to speak about it, for His time had not yet come (John 7:6, 8). Indeed, all believers today await the final appointed time when Jesus will return, something that will not be revealed to anyone prematurely (Mark 13:32–33). Demons, on the other hand, are aware that their time of judgment is coming, but it was not while Jesus was on the earth (Matthew 8:29). They also knew who Jesus was, but He did not permit them to speak out prior to God’s timing (Mark 1:34; Luke 4:41).

Clearly, the time for God to open the seal after “many days” was in the distant future. This “obviously refers to the crisis years (of Epiphanes’ destruction and desecration) of 167–164 B.C.” (Daniel—Minor Prophets, 105). The message was important enough to instruct Daniel to seal it up, to take measures to protect and preserve these words (compare with 12:9; Isaiah 8:16). The great emotional strain and exhaustion Daniel experienced after receiving Gabriel’s message about the coming tribulation (Daniel 8:27), prompted Daniel’s great prayer of chapter 9 (see last week’s lesson).

At best, prophetic literature is problematic to decipher—especially to assign to specific events in history or developing trends: “The concept of a predetermined historical sequence is one of the most difficult aspects of apocalyptic literature” (Daniel, 121). Indeed, this is why many have made embarrassing mistakes, thinking they had accurately solved the riddle for exactly when certain events were going to happen, such as the return of Jesus. Even errors like this, made with the greatest intentions, reflect badly on all believers.

Another aspect of this type of passage goes to the heart of the church’s confidence in God. If God’s own temple can be destroyed by an evil pagan and along with it the means of maintaining a holy relationship with him, it can create profound questions about the security of any tangible element of faith in the world. For those truly strong in the faith, their security is rooted in God Himself and not in anything made by people. In this light, especially for New Testament believers, the hope of a future, eternal Jerusalem and permanent temple, of which the former were only prototypes, is as real as the very presence of God that sustains our faith (see Revelation 11:19; 21:2, 22). Ultimately, all believers have the hope that evil will be overcome and justice will prevail. This is true regardless of the length of the wait or the pain that ensues (Daniel 8:25). The hope that sustains is the core assurance that the day is coming soon when every form of evil will be completely and permanently brought to an end (Revelation 20:10, 14).

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

A Guide into the Future  
(Exodus 23:20–25)

## **TUESDAY**

A Messenger of Rebuke  
(Judges 2:1–5)

## **WEDNESDAY**

A Messenger with Good News  
(Luke 1:8–20)

## **THURSDAY**

A Messenger from God  
(Luke 1:26–38)

## **FRIDAY**

A Helper in Understanding  
(Daniel 8:13–18)

## **SATURDAY**

A Helper in Response to Prayer  
(Daniel 9:20–27)

## **SUNDAY**

A Helper in Facing the Future  
(Daniel 8:19–26)