

Daniel's Vision of the Ram and the Goat

Our study is another vision in the book of Daniel that is recorded in chapter 8 of Daniel. The opening verse reads:

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. Daniel 8:1 (NASB)

The first thing we discover is that it is the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. Daniel obviously is the one who is speaking. But what I want you to first realize is that it is the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. We know from history and archaeological data that Belshazzar began his reign in the year 556 B.C. He was the crown prince of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and his father was the true king. So Belshazzar stayed in Babylon and ruled the empire while his father was in Saudi Arabia.



That means the date of Daniel's vision in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar is 553 B.C.

When Daniel said the vision appeared "subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously," he was talking about the vision in Daniel 7. In Daniel 7:1, we were told it was the first year of Belshazzar. This means that the vision in Daniel 8 occurred after the dream in Daniel 7. In addition, both

Daniel 7 and 8 occurred chronologically between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. Daniel 4 was the last chapter dealing with King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 5 described the defeat of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and consequently, the last year of Belshazzar's reign. Then the Medo-Persian Empire controlled Babylon. Technically, this chapter then fits between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5.

Verse 2:

I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the

Ulai Canal.

Daniel 8:2 (NASB)

Daniel said that he looked into the vision, and he saw himself beside the Ulai Canal. The Ulai Canal was just a simple canal. He is in the citadel of Susa. Technically the word citadel

could refer either to a palace or to a fortress. We believe the citadel of Sus was a fortress in the province of Elam. Elam used to be an empire. So that explains the setting.

Daniel put all these piece parts together for us. Often times when we read verse 2, we just read it and keep on going because we do not understand the location of ancient Elam and the citadel. But I like to see where things are on maps.

If you were to look at a map, you would find that the citadel or fortress of Susa (see map from biblemapper.com), was 250 miles east of the city of Babylon, where Daniel has apparently been most of the time. History records that later the Persian kings used the fortress of Susa as a winter residence. In 1901 archaeologists found the Code of Hammurabi at the ruins of the fortress of Susa. So the city or fortress of Susa was an important place. Daniel said he was in the city or fortress of Susa beside the Ulai Canal.

The Vision of the Ram.

Verse 3:

Then I lifted my eyes 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.

Daniel 8:3 (NASB)

This verse is describing the Medo-Persian Empire. If you are not sure that is the Medo-Persian Empire, read verse 20, which is part of the interpretation section. Verse 3 is part of

the vision section, which starts in verse 1 and ends in verse 14. The interpretation section starts in verse 15 and ends in verse 26. So if we look ahead at verse 20, we are told,

The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. Daniel 8:20 (NASB)



That is what we just read in verse 3. The ram has two horns. The horns are long and “one of them is longer than the other one.” We already saw in our study in Daniel 2 and 7, that the two horns represent two kings. Put another way, the Medo-Persian Empire was really a composite of two empires: the Persian Empire and the Median Empire. The stronger part of the empire was the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great. That is the point being made

in this verse. Interestingly enough, a Roman historian states that the Persian ruler carried the gold head of a ram with him when he marched in front of his army. When he marched in front of his army, the Persian ruler carried a baton. On the top of the baton was the gold head of a ram. That means the

ram was symbolic of the Medo-Persian Empire. That is why a ram is being used here in verse 3 and in verse 20, we are told it was the Medo-Persian Empire.

Verse 4:

I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, 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. Daniel 8:4 (NASB)

Here we are told that Cyrus the Great conquered a large territory. He moved west, south, and north, conquering and expanding his territory. If you look at a map, you discover that his empire extended all the way from Greece to Iran, and from Asia Minor all the way south to Egypt. His empire was a vast territory.

Vision of the Male Goat. In verse 5 Daniel said,

While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had conspicuous horn between his eyes. Daniel 8:5 (NASB)

We are told the goat moved “without touching the ground.” The goat had great speed. We would think that would describe a bird or a flying goat moving really fast. Verse 21 in the interpretation section it was the empire of Greece. Verse 21 reads,

The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Daniel 8:21 (NASB)

This describes the first king of the Empire of Greece, Alexander the Great. We know that in rapid time he extended the Grecian Empire from Greece to India, and from the Caspian Sea, all the way down to Egypt. His empire was larger than the Medo-Persian Empire, and Alexander conquered this territory in record time. He had four generals with him. It is incredible what history tells us that he accomplished. So he is

represented by the shaggy goat with one horn.

Verse 6 adds,

He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. Daniel 8:6 (NASB)

Now we are told that the goat attacked the ram “with mighty wrath.” With Daniel 8, we have now returned to the Hebrew section. The section written in Aramaic was from chapters 2 through 7. We are now back in the Hebrew section which begins with verse 1 of chapter 8. We are told now that the goat attacked the ram “with mighty wrath.” The Hebrew word for “wrath” actually has the idea of venom, the poison of a snake.

The Medo-Persian Empire had tried to invade Greece a number of times. The first attempt was by Darius I in 490 B.C. The second attempt was by Xerxes I in 480 B.C., and the Greeks never got over it. The Greeks were furious about it. So Alexander the Great moved against the Medo-Persian Empire with vengeance. Verse 7 adds,

I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. Daniel 8:7 (NASB)

It was incredible what Alexander the Great did! The word “enraged,” the word “struck,” and the word “shattered” are in the imperfect tense. That refers to repeated behavior. History tells us Alexander the Great fought three decisive battle with the Medo-Persian Empire. One of them was on the western part of Asia Minor, one was in the middle, and the last one was near the city of Nineveh. Alexander the Great attacked with 32,000 infantrymen and 4,500 cavalry. During the last battle at Nineveh, the Persians had roughly a quarter of a million troops, but Alexander the Great defeated them in 331 B.C. The Medo-Persian Empire ceased to be an empire in 331 B.C. and that was a turning point.

That is consistent with the overview we read in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. Chapters 2 and 7 described four empires. In Daniel 2:32 and 39, the chest of silver symbolized the Medo-Persian Empire and the waist of bronze is the Grecian Empire. Daniel 7:5 symbolically represents the Medo-Persian empire and Daniel 7:6 is the empire of Greece. Daniel 8, in a sense, zooms in on these two empires. Daniel 8 tells us explicitly that the second empire was the Medo-Persian and the third one was the Grecian Empire. Daniel 8 helps us identify these two kingdoms. There is no doubt. There is no ambiguity. It is very specific.

Alexander the Great's Kingdom Divided. So Alexander the Great accomplished a great deal. Then verse 8 states:

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. Daniel 8:8 (NASB)

Conspicuous means that it is apparent or obvious, and we are told:

“ . . . toward the four winds of heaven.”

We know from history that when Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided by his four generals. They split it up in 301 B.C. The empire that Alexander the Great once had became four separate empires.

Vision and Interpretation of Antiochus.

When we come to verse 9, all of a sudden we find that we are not talking about all four empires, we are now talking about just one empire. Verse 9 focuses on the Seleucid Empire. And we are told,

Out of them, out of one of them, came forth a rather small horn . . . Daniel 8:9a (NASB)

This is rather interesting. This is a fascinating little statement. The statement “rather small” actually has the idea of insignificant. So the idea is that this “one” is insignificant.

This particular ruler was Antiochus IV Epiphanies. He was the eighth ruler of the Seleucid Empire, and he reigned from roughly 175 to 163 B.C.

The interpretation is given in verses 22-23.

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.

In the latter period of their rule,

When the transgressors have run their course,

A king will arise,

Insolent and skilled in intrigue.

Daniel 8:22-23 (NASB)

The king that arises was Antiochus Epiphanies. This chapter gives us the vision at the beginning. Then the interpretation is given at the end of the chapter. We will move back and forth between the vision and the interpretation to put the events in order.

We are told that this king was insignificant and “skilled in intrigue.” In what way was he skilled in intrigue? He seized the throne after Seleucid IV was assassinated with the help of another king. When he got the throne, he murdered the legitimate heir to the throne. This man was not of royal line and heritage. He should not have been the king of the Seleucid Empire at this point. So he was insignificant.

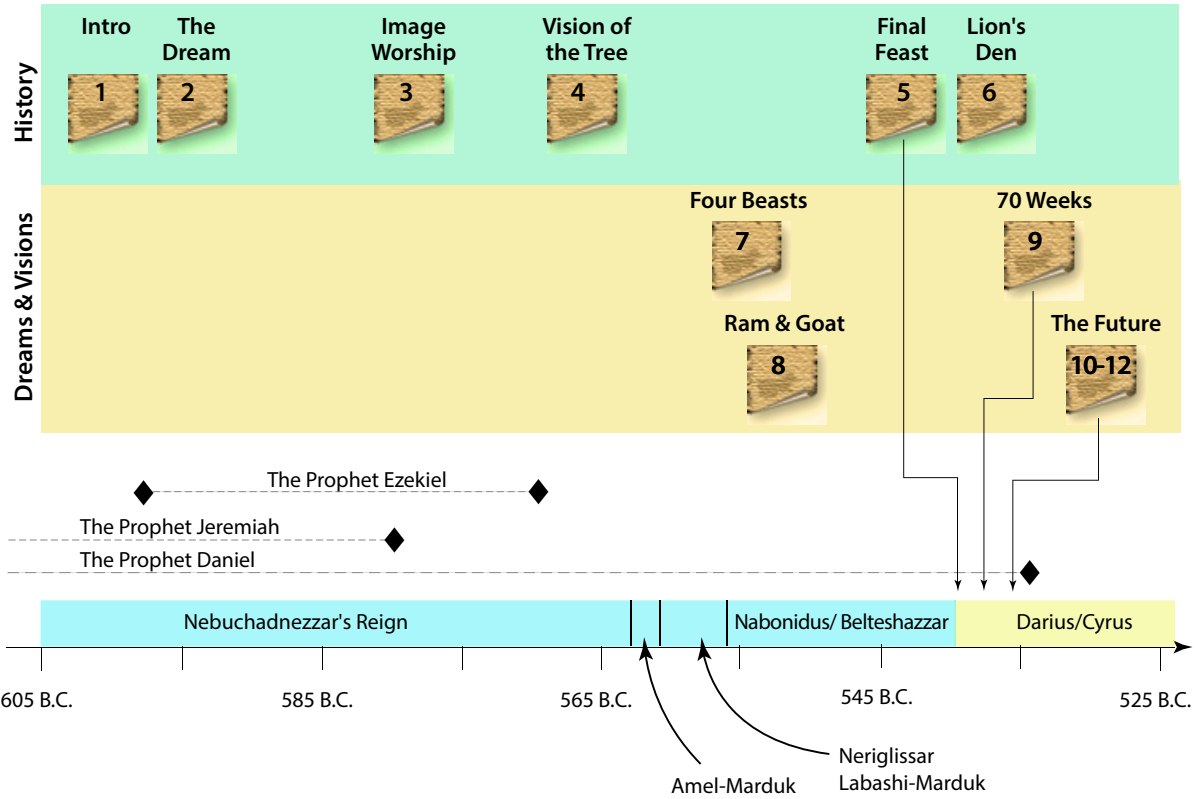
. . . which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. Daniel 8:9b (NASB)

The “beautiful land” is a reference to Israel. If you are interested, check out 2 Samuel 1:19 and Jeremiah 3:19. We are told that he would expand his territory. He moved down into Israel. Verse 10 says,

It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. Daniel 8:10 (NASB)

Verse 11 adds,

Outline of Daniel



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It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host . . . Daniel 8:11a (NASB)

the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. Daniel 8:11b (NASB)

I wanted to read the first part of verse 11 because it is the same Hebrew wording as the first part of verse 10. When it says “grew up,” it really means “magnified himself.” So Antiochus Epiphanies thought he was very important. When it says he “grew up to the host of heaven,” it is another reference to the nation of Israel. Check out Genesis 15:5, Exodus 12:4, and Jeremiah 33:22. We are told he trampled them down. What does that mean? He killed them. He killed a lot of them—not all of them, but many of them. When verse 11 states, “It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host . . .” The Commander of the host is God. Then verse 11 adds,

Antiochus thought that he was equal to God. So he changed the laws. He changed the times of the sacrifices. He just radically changed the Mosaic Law for his own purpose. He thought that God was not that important. He viewed himself as equal with God. He could do as he wanted. We are told that he even magnified himself to be equal with the Commander. He thought he was on a footing equal with God and could change God’s laws.

What he did is described in 1 Maccabees 1:41-64. It is a critical passage. 1 Maccabees is important if you want to know what Antiochus IV Epiphanes did. 1Maccabees 1:41-64 reads.

. . . and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and

Moreover king Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, And every one should leave his laws: so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king. Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the sabbath. 1 Maccabees 1:41-43¹

As I was reading this, I could not help but think about where our country is headed. Verses 44-64 say,

The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king's decree was death.

The king not only issued the same decree throughout his whole empire, but he also appointed officials to supervise the people and commanded each town in Judea to offer pagan sacrifices.²

That is, he appointed people to make sure the people did what he wanted.

Many of the Jews were ready to forsake the Law and to obey these officials. They defiled the land with their

1. 1 Maccabees 1. BibleGateway. (www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Maccabees%201&version=GNT)

2. Ibid.

evil, and their conduct forced all true Israelites to hide wherever they could.

On the fifteenth day of the month of Kislev in the year 145, King Antiochus set up the Awful Horror on the altar of the Temple, and pagan altars were built in the towns throughout Judea. Pagan sacrifices were offered in front of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burned, and anyone who was caught with a copy of the sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king. Month after month these wicked people used their power against the Israelites caught in the towns.

On the twenty-fifth of the month, these same evil people offered sacrifices on the pagan altar erected on top of the altar in the Temple. Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put to death in accordance with the king's decree. Their babies were hung around their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death. But many people in Israel firmly resisted the king's decree and refused to eat food that was ritually unclean. They preferred to die rather than break the holy covenant and eat unclean food—and many did die. In his anger . . .³

So Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the temple, murdered people, and changed the laws. This occurred because Israel had made God angry.

In his anger God made Israel to suffer terribly.

That last comment really struck me when I read it. God was willing to allow His temple to be desecrated and His chosen people killed as a form of discipline.

Now I want you to look at verses 12-13.

And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it

3. Ibid.

will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper. 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?”
Daniel 8:12-13 (NASB)

This is an incredible picture! The book of 1 Maccabees said that God allowed Israel to suffer because of their sin. What does Daniel 8:12 said this happened because of their sin. That is what Daniel wrote down from his vision, “on account of transgression, the host will be given.” That is, Israel will be given over to Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

It is truly amazing to think that Israel did not hate sin and did not desire to do God’s will. Remember when the twelve spies went to check out the land promised to Israel. Because the spies came back and gave a false report, everybody was afraid to enter. Because of their unbelief, they ended up walking in the wilderness for forty years before they entered the Promised Land. You would have thought that Israel had learned to trust and obey God. But they had not.

Eventually, they entered the Promised Land. Then they asked for a king, and their kings sinned. So God punished them for their disobedience and worship of idols. Then the Assyrian Empire invaded and deported the people in the northern part of Israel. Then the Babylonian Empire invaded and they deported the southern part called Judah, and took them to Babylon. That is why in the next chapter, we are going to study the Babylonian captivity that lasted for seventy years. The books of Nehemiah and Ezra tell us the Israelites returned to the land, rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem. You would have thought that everything was great. But now God says that there will come a day in the future when the Israelites are going to suffer again on account of their sin. Yes, they did it again. What did they do?!

Malachi gives us a clue. It is the last book in the Old Testament before the intertestamental period. Malachi 1:2 says,

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” Malachi 1:2 (NASB)

The Israelites challenge, “You do not really love us, you do not really care for us.” God says, “Yes I do, I love you, but you say, ‘How have you loved us?’” What is really sad is that the priests are responding and saying, “God, you really do not love us.” Then in verse 6, God says,

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’” Malachi 1:6 (NASB)

Look at that! The priests despised God. If we read the chapter, we discover they were offering sacrifices to God—but not the best. They are offering the lame and the sick, the animals that nobody wants. God says, “Why do you not offer it to your governor? Will he want what you give me?” We would not do that today. We would not offer our governor an animal that is sick and dying. We would give him something good. In verse 13, God says,

“You also say, ‘My, how tiresome it is!’ And you disdainfully sniff at it . . .” Malachi 1:13a (NASB)

Then God says that their worship is half-hearted. He says,

. . . and you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?” says the LORD. Malachi 1:13b (NASB)

The priests did not have a heart for God. In chapter 2 we discover the priests avoided teaching things that might offend somebody. They twisted Scripture so that the people were happy with what they were teaching. We have a lot of that going on in our country today. Often pastors and other Bible teachers are not teaching what they believe is truth because they want a big audience, and are afraid of conflict.

God rebuked them in chapter 1 and chapter 2. In the rest of the chapter, we discover the people were committing

adultery, marrying unbelievers, divorcing their spouses, and complaining about the wicked. They complained that God honored and respected the wicked. Then in Malachi 3:8, God said they were robbing Him. When you give to Me, you are holding back. You are not giving Me the whole tithe.”

In verses 13-15, we are told they believed it was vain to serve God. They received nothing in return. Malachi 3:16 is incredible. All of a sudden we learn who has been speaking in the book of Malachi were unbelieving priests. Verse 16 says,

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. Malachi 3:16 (NASB)

Guess who has been complaining from chapter 1 through chapter 3? Unbelievers! Most of the problem was that the nation of Israel was filled with unbelievers, and their lives demonstrated it.

Unfortunately, 1 John 5 captures the present situation in which we find our country. First 1 John 5:3 says,

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:3 (NASB)

It says, “For the love of God, we keep His commandments.” Then it says that “His commandments are not burdensome.” He said, “This is the proof that you love God. When I tell you to do something, you will want to obey!” Look at 1 John 2:3-4.

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:3-4 (NASB)

God is telling us that the proof you are a Christian is that you do what He wants. 1 John 5:3 says that if you know Him, you

love him. Verse 4 says, “If you say you love Him and you are not keeping His commandments, then you are a liar.” People say, “Oh, we should not call anybody a liar!” But God did. If you do not keep His commandments, you are deceiving yourself.

That was the problem the Israelites had. The Israelites were not believers and followers of God, except for a few. So God let Antiochus IV Epiphanes cause the Israelites to suffer. The Israelites did not believe God—not all of them. Malachi said there was a remnant. I am afraid that in many churches in America, there is just a small group who are true believers.

Now back to the middle of Daniel 8:13. It says,

How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply. Daniel 8:13b (NASB)

In other words, how long is this vision? What is the time frame or chronological period? Verse 14 gives us the answer,

He said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored.” Daniel 8:14 (NASB)

The phrase “the Holy Place will be properly restored” refers to the rededication of “the Holy Place.” According to 1 Maccabees 4:52-59, this occurred on December 25, 165 B.C., after the pigs were sacrificed on the altar and the idol of Zeus was put into the temple. If we back up 2,300 days, we arrive at the date of September 6, 171 B.C. This is the date Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the temple. Verse 15-17 says,

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, 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.” 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.” Daniel 8:15-17 (NASB)

The time of the end is near the end of the Seleucid Empire. Verses 18-19 now look beyond Antiochus IV Epiphanes to the end time when the future antichrist will appear (see the prophecy in Daniel 7 for information about him).

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. He said, "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 8:18-19 (NASB)

Now we have already read verses 20-23 as part of the vision section. Here now is verse 24. It says,

His power will be mighty, but not by his own power . . . Daniel 8:24a (NASB)

I believe that is reference to demonic power.

. . . And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree. . . . Daniel 8:24b (NASB)

We know from history that Antiochus IV Epiphanes ended up murdering 80,000 Jews. He sold 40,000 Jews into slavery. So, he destroyed 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,
But he will be broken without human agency.
Daniel 8:24c-25 (NASB)

We understand that he died of insanity and apparently a bowel disease.

"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."
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 at the vision, and there was none to explain it.
Daniel 8:26-27 (NASB)

Conclusion. Why this prophecy? The prophecy was given so that when the Israelites suffered, they would understand that God had spoken. God wrote this prophecy so that when they went through this difficult time with Antiochus Epiphones, they would understand that God said it was going to happen, and it was only for a short period of time. He was still with them. So they would not lose heart. Do you know what this reveals? God is holy and hates our sin, but He is also a compassionate God. He cares about us. Let us pray.