

What it all means

Unsurprisingly, Daniel spent time “trying to understand” what he had just seen (v 15). Thankfully, for him and for us, a messenger is sent to explain it.

Help arrives

Read Daniel 8 v 15-18

- ❓ *Who is the messenger (v 16)?*
- ❓ *What is the key to understanding what the vision means (v 17)?*

We need to understand what is meant by “the time of the end”. It’s often taken to mean the second coming of Jesus at the end of history. But these verses make much more sense if the phrase is taken to mean a time that comes much later in history than the moment the vision was given.

The vision explained

Read Daniel 8 v 19-27

The ram represents Medo-Persia (v 20). The goat “is the king of Greece” (v 21)—Alexander the Great, who conquered a vast swathe of territory, including the Medo-Persian Empire. After his death, four rulers came to have power over regions of his empire.

- ❓ *What will happen next (v 23-24)?*
- ❓ *What will this king be like (v 24-25)?*

The most likely historical figure described by the “fierce-looking king” is Antiochus Epiphanes, who ruled from 175 BC until 164 BC. He fought Israel, took Jerusalem, worshipped Zeus there, and turned it into a brothel, forcing Jews to join him in his “worship”.

So what did the vision tell Daniel? That God’s people were going to face a time of almost unimaginable catastrophe—worse, even, than the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in Daniel’s own lifetime, which had led to the exile. It’s no surprise that Daniel reacts as he does (v 27).

- ❓ *How will this king be destroyed (v 25)?*

Jews see the fulfilment of this in Judas Maccabees, who defeated Antiochus. But notice that Antiochus became king “not by his own power” (v 24)—and that he would be destroyed “not by human power” (v 25). Apocalyptic literature is complex, and exciting, because it has multiple fulfilments—and so Gabriel likely has in view Antiochus and Judas Maccabees, but also a greater enemy ruler, and a greater deliverer. **Read Luke 11 v 14-22; Revelation 22 v 1-3.** The ram, the goat and the horn do not have the final word: the Lamb, the greater defeater of Satan, does.

Pray

Thank God for helping us to have the right expectations about what life will be like before the Lamb returns. Thank God that, because of the Lamb’s life and death, evil has been defeated. Thank God that you know what your future holds, and pray you would persevere until you reach that future.