

Gender Mismatches in Dan 8:9-12

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Table 1 below shows all the verb forms that occur in Dan 8:9-12. In all there are twelve verbs but only eleven unique forms. *Wattigdal* occurs twice (vss. 9, 10). In table 1 below, beside each form I show the expected gender of each verb's grammatical subject.

Table 1
Hebrew Verb Forms in Dan 8:9-12

Verb Form	M/F		Gloss
yāšāʾ	M	Vs. 9	went forth
wattigdal	F	Vss. 9, 10	grew great
wattappēl	F	Vs. 10	caused X to fall
wattirm ^e sēm	F	Vs. 10	trampled X
higdīl	M	Vs. 11	grew great
hērīm	M	Vs. 11	lifted up X ¹
w ^e hūšlak	M	Vs. 11	was thrown down
tinnātēn	F	Vs. 12	was given over
w ^e tašlēk	F	Vs. 12	threw X down
w ^{ec} aš ^{et} tā	F	Vs. 12	did
w ^e hišlīḥâ	F	Vs. 12	succeeded

In table 2 I show a complete list of all noun forms which serve as grammatical subjects in vss. 9-12. There are three of them.

Table 2
Hebrew Nouns that Serve as Subjects
in Dan 8:9-12

Noun Subject	M/F	Gloss
qēren (ʾaḥat)	F	(a) horn
m ^e kôn miqdāšô	M	[the] place of his sanctuary
šābāʾ	F	[the] host

¹ In isolation from its context the verb *hērīm* means to "lift (something) up." But of course in Dan 8:11 *hērīm* does not occur in isolation from its context – one part of which is the preposition immediately following. This preposition affects the meaning of its clause.

In table 3 (below) I bring the verb forms of table 1 together with the noun forms of table 2. Notice that if there are twelve verbs and only three nouns to serve as subjects of those verbs,² not every verb can have its own separate and unique subject. In fact the form *qéren* "horn" is subject of ten out of twelve of the verb forms listed. It is not mentioned twelve times. Doing that would make very tedious reading. But it does not need to be mentioned ten times for us to understand Daniel's intent. Anyone who knows Hebrew will not be confused by the way Daniel states himself. Consider an example.

1. a. *yāšāʾ qéren ʾaḥat*
b. *wattigdal*
2. a. a horn went forth
b. and it grew great

We do not need for the text to say something like the following in order to know what it means:

3. a. *yāšāʾ qéren ʾaḥat*
b. **wattigdal qéren ʾaḥat*
c. **wattigdal haqqéren*
4. a. a horn went forth
b. and a horn grew great
c. and the horn grew great

What is happening grammatically in the case of those verb forms where another noun, other than *qéren*, is specifically mentioned should be clear enough. If another noun is given, then that is what the verb next to it should apply to. But if another noun is not given, context makes clear that the one Daniel intends is *qéren*. Writing the same word ten times would sound clumsy in any language and is unnecessary. The prophet's intent should be clear enough just as the text reads. See table 3.

² Two of the verb forms are passive, and therefore, at one level, have no subject. But in Hebrew there are conjugations (in this case *hop^cal* and *niph^cal*) which have a morphological form analogous to active verbs, but are semantically passive.

Table 3
Combinations of Hebrew Verb Form
and Subject Noun in Dan 8:9-12

Verb Form	M/F	Noun Subject	M/F	Gloss
Verse 9				
yāšāʔ	M	qéren ʔaḥat	F	a horn went forth
wattigdal	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] grew great
Verse 10				
wattigdal	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] grew great
wattappēl	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] caused X to fall
wattirm ^e sēm	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] trampled X
Verse 11				
higdîl	M	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] grew great
hērîm (K) + ûmimmennû	M	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] removed X
w ^e hūšlak		m ^e kôn miqdāšô	M	and the place of his sanctuary was thrown down
Verse 12				
tinnātēn	F	šabāʔ	F	and the host was given over
w ^e tašlêk	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] threw X down
w ^{ec} aš ^{et} â	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] did
w ^e hišlîḥâ	F	[qéren]	F	and [the horn] succeeded

Verse 11 requires special comment, because two of the verb forms that occur there are grammatically masculine. The word *qéren*, of course, is feminine. So is it possible to say that the intended noun described by those verbs is *qéren*? The two active verbs in question are *higdîl* and *hērîm* – together with its accompanying preposition *min* ("from"). This preposition is not irrelevant to the meaning of its clause. The person who wishes to say it is has some explaining to do on a grammatical level. So the lexical meaning of *hērîm* in context is one thing. But what we are discussing here is the gender of the two verbs. As stated, both are masculine, whereas *qéren* is femine. So obviously the little horn (*qéren*) cannot be what removes the daily. Or can it?

No one can deny that the genders don't match. So clearly, *qéren* can't be the grammatical subject of *hērîm*, therefore it cannot remove the daily, and that settles the argument. But look again at vs. 9. We're not dealing there with understood subjects. The subject is specified. The words *qéren ʔaḥat* ("a horn") appear in the text, and so does *yāšāʔ* ("he went forth"). What's wrong with this picture? The genders don't match. "Horn" is feminine, "went forth" is masculine.

There are a number of factors to consider here which, when taken together, make it reasonable to think that there is no grammatical reason to say that *qéren* ("horn") can't be the one who removes the daily. As we proceed, bear in mind that we are not looking for reasons why it is necessary for the genders to be mismatched in vs. 11, but why it would be possible for this to happen. We are not writing the passage. It has

already been written for us long ago. So what we are explaining is why it should be possible to do what Daniel did. There are a numbers of factors to consider.

The first factor is that if *qéren* is not the agent at work in these verbs, something else must be. What is it then? There are only two others to choose from, if we limit ourselves to what is stated in the text, and both of them are already taken. The Prince () did not remove the daily from the Prince. And the host did not remove the daily from the Prince. If we wish to add a fourth noun, not stated in the text, there is no textual justification for doing so. Our task is to interpret the passage, not to rewrite it. I submit that we must limit ourselves to the materials Daniel himself has supplied. Thus, we must understand the passage along the following lines:

5. a. w^{ec}ad šar-ḥaṣābā^ʔ ḥigdīl
 b. ûmimmennû hērîm hattamîd
 c. w^ehūšlak m^{ek}ôn miqdāšô

6. a. and [the horn] grew great up to the Prince of the host
 b. and from [the Prince] [the horn] removed the daily
 c. and the place of [the Prince's] sanctuary was cast down

The second factor to consider is that this verse describes the activity of the little horn. It does not show what the Prince of the host does to the horn. That comes later. Instead it shows what the little horn does to the Prince. The horn (a) magnifies himself against the Prince, (b) removes the daily from the Prince, and (c) casts down the place of the Prince's sanctuary.

It is true that the horn can do none of these things in the literal sense of ascending to heaven in bodily form and wresting the place of Christ's daily ministry from Him by force. Ascending to heaven would bring the horn closer to the sanctuary, but not closer to his goal – if his goal were to move certain physical objects from one location to another. Under no conditions would he have the ability to move the heavenly sanctuary literally. And besides, so long as Christ ministered in it, it would not matter where the sanctuary was located. What is significant here is Christ Himself, not the building He ministers in (see Matt 23:16-22). In this case it is Christ who makes the building special, not the building that makes Christ special.

Are we to proceed on the assumption that if an action isn't physical, it isn't real? If the action isn't literal, the passage can't be true? Only physical actions are spiritually relevant? I hope no one would take such positions. In any event, if the tone of the passage were literal, rather than figurative, we would not be reading about horns and beasts. We would be reading about people. The language is figurative. Can we justify interpreting figurative language spiritually? I hope so.

The third factor is that in vs. 11 Daniel refers to Christ as the "Prince of the host." This expression is not a symbol. It is a direct reference to the Son of God. In the same verse, and I believe in the same spirit, Daniel refers to the little horn power using masculine verb forms. Is there any connection between these two facts – i.e., the fact that Christ is referred to as the "Prince of the host" and the fact that His opponent is referred here in a way that implies masculine grammatical gender? I submit that there is.

Normally “horn” in Hebrew requires feminine verb forms, as mentioned above. But there is some latitude in applying this rule. In vs. 9 Daniel says, *yasaʿ qéren ʾahat*, “a horn went forth.” We can be sure the word for “horn” (*qéren*) is feminine here, because of the adjective that accompanies it. The adjective *ʾahat* (not *ʾehad*) is just as certainly feminine as the verb *yasaʿ* is masculine. This discrepancy was allowed for a reason or it was not. If there is a reason, what is it?

I don’t have a good explanation for the conflict in genders in vs. 9. It occurs. From the fact that this sort of thing obviously does happen I infer that it can happen. So when we find the same thing again in vs. 11 we should realize that taking this sort of apparent liberty is at least possible grammatically.

The fourth factor to consider, then, is the tension between symbol and application. Daniel was aware that the Prince of the host would be opposed by people rather than animals. The church was not harassed during the Middle Ages by symbols, but by people. He might not have understood why the timeframe for the prophecy should be so long, but he did understand that the language he used was symbolic. What did it symbolize? It symbolized the actions of real people.

The feminine gender of most of the verb forms derives from the nature of the symbol. In vs. 11 Daniel's use of a masculine verb derives from the nature of the application. Context supports this. He has just referred to Christ as the Prince of the host, which is not a symbol. Now he reflects for a moment on the reality behind his horn symbol and speaks of this historical power as a man. The man who opposes the Prince would of course not be just one individual, but a representative of some human institution. Over time it would be made up of a series of men. But my point is that such usage illustrates what we call “corporate identity.”

In Ezek 23:49 God speaks symbolically of Israel as an unfaithful woman, using feminine verb forms, but then addresses Israel – the target of the symbol – directly and says, “Then you [masculine] shall know that I am God.” Is Israel masculine or feminine? How shall we reconcile this apparent contradiction? It isn't a contradiction when we realize the prophet's intent. Such usage does not violate good grammar. It shows that as a paragraph unfolds a writer can think of his subject matter in more than one way, and illustrates that doing this can have grammatical implications. We do not need passages such as Ezek 23:49 to justify Daniel's use of mixed genders. Dan 8:9 has already done that for us under circumstances where the identity of the noun subject is not in doubt.

There is nothing puzzling here or unduly hard to understand. The Prince is Christ in heaven. He would be opposed on earth by a power represented to us through symbols. This opposition would take place through a process of imitation. By doing here what Christ does there, the ministry of Christ is transferred from heaven to earth. It is cast to the ground. The power that casts it down is the power that imitates what Christ does in heaven.

It is true that the horn can do none of these things in any literal sense, but the verse does not require this. If the language were literal we would not be reading about horns; we would be reading directly about men.

Actually, the use of masculine gender in vs. 11 for two verbs that refer to the horn's activity, can be accounted for quite simply by assuming that Daniel goes beyond the symbol for a moment and reflects on the historical power that the symbol represents.

This sort of shift would be more appropriate in vs. 11 than in any other verse in the passage, because this is the verse that speaks of the Prince of the host, which is either less symbolic than other terms used in the passage or is not symbolic at all. If "the Prince of the host" a direct reference to Christ, it would make sense to have a direct reference to the power that opposes Christ.

The precedent for this sort of shift is found in vs. 9, where the subject of ya's'a> (masculine) is qeren <a'hat (feminine). In vs. 11 it's not so much a matter of grammar as it is a matter of focus. There are other verses where this occurs. X is an example.