

And The Visions Keep On Coming!
An Apocalyptic Ram, Goat and Little Horn

Daniel 8:1-27

Introduction: I am a huge fan of expository preaching, and for many reasons.

Because I believe the Bible, all of it, to be inspired, inerrant, and infallible, I feel a spiritual obligation to honor the text as it was given to us by God. This is His Word, and I must rightly handle this word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). I should never, ever tamper with it.

There is another reason why I am committed to book by book, chapter by chapter and verse by verse preaching of the Bible. It forces us to handle tough texts and tough issues, texts and issues we would gladly ignore or neglect. Daniel 8 is one of those tough text (so are Daniel 9 – 12!). It is that kind of text you would only go to if you were preaching chapter by chapter through the book of Daniel! Otherwise, you would give it a pass.

Daniel 8 is where we move from the Aramaic language that began in 2:4 back to the Hebrew language for the remainder of the book. Chapters 8-12 deal with Israel and what lies in her future. Hebrew is more fitting because this was the language of God’s people. This is also the second apocalyptic vision we encounter in Daniel 7 – 12, but it is not the last. It is related both to Daniel 2 and 7. It covers similar material but it also introduces things that are new. This text orbits around 3

main characters: a ram, a goat and a “little horn” (v. 9). Some things in this text are clearly explained for us. Others are more unclear, requiring humility and our best educated guesses. Once more we will be comforted and encouraged by the truth that our God is sovereign over all the nations and the leaders who rule them. As Daniel 2:21 affirms of our Lord, “He removes kings and sets up kings.” (cf. 4:17, 25, 32). Tyrants of this age strut briefly on the stage. God raises them up and He takes them out! If our God has this kind of power over the nations and its rulers, surely that same power is in control of our lives as well. That is good news when rams, goats and little horns are running wild among the nations!

Our chapter divides easily into two major sections: 1) A vision in verses 1-14 and 2) the interpretation in verses 15-28.

I. God gave Daniel a vision 8:1-14

Daniel 7 and 8 are related but different. Chapter 7 gave a vision of the four great kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Chapter 8 provides a vision that narrows the focus to Medo-Persia and Greece. It will particularly detail personalities and events related to Greece and what will transpire during its rise to power (331-146 B.C.). It will be a very tumultuous and troubling time for God’s people, especially towards the end. They will suffer and suffer greatly. God, in grace, is preparing them ahead of time.

God’s people had never before faced what they would in the little horn, a man

named Antiochus Epiphanes, an evil antichrist type ruler who would institute “a systematic programme designed to eradicate completely every trace of Israel’s faith, worship and life. Hence the extreme emergency justified the detailed prediction. The day would come when Israel would need this revelation” (Dale Davis, *Daniel*, BST, 112). Calvin says it well, “The faithful were informed beforehand of these grievous and oppressive calamities, to induce them to look up to God when oppressed by such extreme darkness” (*Reformation Commentary on Scripture, Ezekiel, Daniel, vol. XII*, 345). I believe this is also a good word for us today as well.

1) God, who knows the future, predicted the rise of Medo-Persia 8:1-4

- Daniel received a 2nd vision following the first one of chapter 7 (v. 1). The prior vision was in the first year of Belshazzar’s reign (7:1; c. 553 B.C.). This one was in his 3rd year (c. 550 B.C.), 2-3 years later. It is interesting to note the repetition of the words “vision” and “saw” throughout the chapter. Daniel is not reading a book. He is watching a sci-fi motion picture. He is seeing and breathing in the fast moving action.
- The vision takes place “in Susa the capital, which is in the province of Elam...at Ulai canal” (v. 2). We should not think that Daniel had physically moved 220 miles east of Babylon and 150 miles north of

the Persian Gulf to what is modern day Iran. No, like John being carried “away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain” (Rev. 21:10), Daniel is transported by a vision to Susa, the capital of Elam. Interestingly, the Code of Hammurapi was discovered in Susa in 1901 (Miller, *Daniel*, NAC, 221).

- Daniel “looked up, and there was a ram” with two long horns (*ESV*, “high”), though “one was longer than the other, and the longer one came up last” (v. 3). This is Medo-Persia (v. 20). The longer (stronger, higher) horn denotes Persia’s greater strength and dominance. The ram was an appropriate symbol for this empire in the vision as the Persians themselves utilized it as they marched into battle (Miller, 222). The ram, under King Cyrus and his successors, extended their empire charging “westward and northward and southward” (v. 4). No one could stop the ram. No one could “rescue from his power. He did whatever he wanted and became great.” For quite a while, it appears indestructible and unbeatable. And, it is, until God raises up and sends a male goat unlike anything the world has ever seen!

2) God, who knows the future, predicted the rise of Greece and Alexander the Great 8:5-8

- The ram looked invincible but then it gets “blitzkreiged” by a male goat. Think how invincible the Carolina Panthers appeared until they got trampled by the Broncos from Denver in Super Bowl 50! The male goat comes from the west so fast he does not even touch the ground, and the whole earth feels his fury. He also has “a conspicuous horn between his eyes” (v. 5). All agree this is Greece (the male goat) and Alexander the Great (the conspicuous horn). Verse 21 makes this plain. Alexander’s life would be brief (356-323 B.C.), just 33 years, but his influence in spreading Greek culture is still with us to this day, especially in the western world.
- Alexander and his Greek armies came against Persia (v. 6-7) “with savage fury” (*ESV*, “powerful wrath”). He quickly and decisively defeated and destroyed the Persian Empire. The verbs in verse seven are truly striking: “infuriated,” “struck,” “shattering,” “threw to the ground,” “trampled.” Indeed, “there was no one to rescue the ram from his power.” The lights went out on the ram when the male goat arrived on the scene. He was vanquished to the dustbin of history. The ram is dead! Long live the goat!
- Alexander and Greece did become great and powerful overnight (v. 8). However, at the pinnacle of power, Alexander dies (“the large

horn shattered”). Four kings will divide up his kingdom and continue in various forms until mighty Rome comes on the scene. The detail and accuracy of God’s prophetic word is truly amazing. Daniel is seeing this and writing it hundreds of years in advance.

3) God, who knows the future, predicted the rise of Antiochus IV Epiphanes

8:9-14

- Alexander’s kingdom, following his death, was divided among four of his generals: Cassander over Macedon and Greece, Lysimachus over Thrace and Asia Minor, Seleucus over Syria and Babylon, Ptolemy over Egypt (v. 8, 22). The vision Daniel receives suddenly narrows its focus to just one of them and a little horn that “emerged and grew extensively toward the south (Egypt), and the east (Persia) and toward the beautiful land” (Israel). Students of scripture are again unanimous that this little horn is the evil king Antiochus IV who emerged from the Seleucid Empire many years later after the death of Alexander the Great. He would reign from 175-163 B.C. and severely persecute God’s people. The accuracy with which his exploits are catalogued have caused liberal scholars to deny the authenticity of Daniel’s prophetic prediction. Surely what we read here is *vaticinium ex eventu*, “prophecy after or from the event.” Daniel did not write this

in the 6th century. A pseudonym penned it under Daniel's name in the 2nd century after these events had already occurred. For those of us who believe in a supernatural God who knows all things past, present and future, such a move of interpretation and understanding is totally unnecessary. It is wrong. God gave Daniel a vision to prepare his people for what was coming, not what had already happened! There would not be much help in the latter.

- The horrible deeds of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (a title Antiochus gave himself meaning “god manifest” or “the Illustrious God.” His enemies called him Epimanes meaning the “madman.”) are addressed in verses 10-14 and 23-26. We will address them in the manner they are given in the text.
- Now, an important clarification: the little horn of chapter 8 is not the little horn of 7:8. That little horn is the end-time Antichrist. The little horn of chapter 8 is Antiochus IV who does serve quite well as a type of the Antichrist. Their attitudes and actions are quite similar, even parallel in how they treat God's people.
- Antiochus persecution of Israel began around 170 B.C. and would last right at 7 years. As he grew in power and pride (“it grew as high as the heavenly host” or army, a reference to God's people, angels or

both), he “made some of the host fall to the earth, and trampled them” (v. 10). He brutally persecuted God’s people. And, in his mind, why not? Joyce Baldwin well says, “The little horn, in reaching for the stars, is claiming equality with God” (*Daniel*, TOTC, 157). Verses 11-12 bear this out. He proclaims equality with God, the “Prince of the host,” and his reign of terror begins. As we shall see, he stops the daily worship of sacrifice and destroys the place of God’s sanctuary. He “will throw truth [God’s Word] to the ground” counting it as worthless. For a time, he “will be successful in whatever it [the little horn] does.” Verses 13-14 reveal all of this will continue “for 2300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be restored” (v. 14). The 2300 evenings and mornings may mean approximately 7 years, or 1150 days or approximately 3 ½ years. In 168 B. C. the temple was desecrated. In 164 B.C. it was cleansed and restored. That fits well with the 3 ½ years understanding.

All of this is exactly what happened. We will provide a historical summary of the key events towards the end of our study. Suffice it to say our God knows the future, and in grace He lets his people in on many of the details to prepare them for what is coming.

- God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible is a gift. God’s interpretation of His revelation is a double gift. Without God’s revelation in Scripture we might draw the conclusions from general revelation (nature and conscience) that a supreme being existence, that the supreme being is powerful and that the supreme being is moral in some way (Psalm 19; Rom. 1-2). Beyond that, we would be left in the dark. Thankfully, the Christian God is a talking God who delights in revealing Himself to His people. In Daniel 8:15-27 God sends his angel Gabriel to help His prophet Daniel to get a hold on the vision of 8:1-14.
- This much Daniel already knows: a little horn of great depravity will arise and make himself great, even claiming divine status for himself (v. 11). He will defeat the saints (v. 10), defile the sanctuary (the temple and holy place; v. 11, 13) and disregard the Scriptures (v. 12). He will do so for 2,300 evenings and mornings, a period of 6-7 years or, more likely, 3-4 years, again depending on how one interprets the phrase.
- This is a lot to consider, but specifics are still wanting. Under no obligation, God, in grace, helps Daniel in “trying to understand.” (v. 15).

1) Understanding God’s Word requires divine assistance 8:15-17

- Daniel is “watching the vision and trying to understand it” (v. 15). Suddenly he says, “there stood before me someone who appeared to be a

man.” His name is Gabriel, an angel of God (v. 16). His name means “man of God,” or possibly “God is my hero/warrior.” Hill points out, “Only in Daniel in the Old Testament are angels named (Gabriel in 8:16; 9:21; [cf. Luke 1:19, 26] Michael in 10:13, 21; 12 [cf. Jude 9; Rev. 12:7])” [*Daniel*, EBC, vol. 8, 152). God has sent him “to explain the vision” to Daniel. Without divine aid, Daniel would not be able to comprehend what he saw.

- Not surprisingly, Daniel is terrified as Gabriel approaches him (v. 17). He “fell facedown” prostrate before the heavenly messenger. Gabriel addresses Daniel as “son of man,” in this context meaning a mere human, one who is mortal. It is not a Christological title as it is in 7:13-14. Gabriel tells Daniel he has come to help him “understand that the vision refers to the time of the end.” Now, we hear that phrase and think end of the age, second coming, millennial kingdom, etc. However, again in context, it is more likely a reference to the particular persons and events prophesied in this chapter; in particular, Antiochus IV and his persecution of the Jewish people. Still, as Miller notes, “it is possible to be true to the text and allow that the little horn of chapter 8, Antiochus IV, may be a type of that one spoken of in chapter 7, the eschatological

Antichrist, for the parallels between their characters and careers are striking” (*Daniel*, NAC, 232).

2) Understanding God’s Word prepares us for what’s coming 8:18-26

- The angel Gabriel starts talking (v. 18) and Daniel goes into a comatose state (“I fell into a deep sleep”)! Gabriel touches him and gets him on his feet. He says, “I am here to tell you what will happen at the conclusion of the time of wrath” (v. 19), that is the time when the persecution (and God’s discipline of His people) under the Syrian Antiochus IV comes to an end. Gabriel tells him, in something of a parallel phrase, that this “refers to the appointed time of the end.” The time has been determined and set by the sovereign Lord of history. God’s people will suffer for their sins, but their suffering will not be indefinite. God is in absolute control of all that is and will happen. This includes the trials and tribulations of his people. Human powers are merely instruments in the hands of an all-powerful and providential God.
- Verses 20-22 enlighten our understanding of the main characters in the vision of verses 1-15. Two-horned ram = Media and Persia. Shaggy goat = Greece. Large horn between the eyes of the goat = the first king (Alexander the Great). The four horns that replaced the shattered horn = four kingdoms (the 4 generals Cassander, Lysimachus, Selucus and

- Ptolemy and their kingdoms). Gabriel says, “they will rise from that nation” of Greece and Alexander, “but without its power.” They will be mini-empires, not major ones on the scale of Medi-Persia and Greece.
- Verses 23-26 then turn to Antichous Epiphanes, referred to as “an insolent king, skilled in intrigue” (v. 23). The *ESV* calls him “a king of bold face.” He is characterized by arrogance and pride. He will arise “near the end of their kingdom” (175-163 B.C.) because mighty Rome is on the way. This will happen “when the rebels” (God’s rebellious people) have reached the full measure of their sin.” Verse 12 provides helpful commentary on this understanding. God is once more disciplining His people for their sin.
 - The word “he” is prominent in verses 24-25 and allows us to outline the activities of the “insolent king” who “will come to the throne” (v. 23).
 - 1) “His power will be great, but it will not be his own” (v. 24). He is a satanically empowered puppet.
 - 2) “He will cause terrible destruction and succeed in whatever he does” (v. 24; cf. 12). He will be victorious in battle, achieve power, and amass wealth.

- 3) “He will destroy the powerful along with the holy people” (v. 24). He will defeat many opponents in war and will war successfully against God’s people for right at 7 years.
 - 4) “He will cause deceit to prosper through his cunning and by his influence” (v. 25). Antiochus Epiphanes will be shrewd and deceptive, stopping at nothing to further his agenda and prosper his hand. Double-faced and duplicitous are his calling cards.
 - 5) He will “in his own mind...make himself great” (v. 25, cf. v. 11). Arrogance, pride and self-divination are his unholy trinity.
 - 6) “He will destroy many in a time of peace” (v. 25). He is a ruthless and unconscious murderer.
 - 7) “He will stand against the Prince of princes” (v. 25). He stands in opposition to God Himself because he thinks he is a god (Zeus manifest).
 - 8) “Yet he will be scattered – not by human hands” (v. 25). His reign will be short and his downfall devastating, all at the hands of the God he mocked and opposed.
- Gabriel affirms the vision is true (v. 26). Daniel must seal it up (write it down), preserving it for those in days yet to come who will need it.

Remember, what is in the past to us was in the future to Daniel. He must safeguard it for future generations.

- So, did the Bible get it right in Daniel 8? The answer is a resounding yes! A brief historical summary adds a little meat to the marrow of Daniel's prophecy. Antiochus Epiphanes was violently bitter against the Jews. He hated them and was determined to exterminate them and their religion. He devastated Jerusalem in 168 B.C., murdered tens of thousands, defiled the Temple, offered a pig on its altar, erected a shrine to Jupiter, prohibited Temple worship, forbade circumcision on pain of death, sold, according to 2 Maccabess 5:11-14, 40,000 Jews into slavery, destroyed all copies of Scripture that could be found, and slaughtered everyone found to be in possession of God's torah. He resorted to every conceivable torture to force Jews to renounce their religion. This eventually led to what historians call the Maccabean revolt in 164 B.C. Judas Maccabees (meaning "the hammer") would lead the Jews to victory and the restoration of their religion. Today Jews celebrate Hanukkah (Festival of Lights to commemorate their liberation) in remembrance of that event. It is referenced in John 10:22 when the Light of the World walked into the temple. And Antiochus? The Jewish book of 2 Maccabees records his end as follows: "But the all-seeing Lord, the

God of Israel, struck him an incurable and unseen blow. As soon as he ceased speaking he was seized with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief and with sharp internal tortures – and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to hasten the journey. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body.” And just like that, the evil and insolent king was gone.

3) Understanding God’s Word can be personally overpowering 8:27

What Daniel saw and took in wiped him out. It was personally overpowering. He was “overcome and lay sick for some days.” The *NIV* says, “I was worn out. I lay exhausted for days.” *The Message* paraphrase says, “I walked around in a daze, unwell for days.” Daniel had been “deeply distressed,” even “terrified” by the vision of chapter seven. He is completely undone by the vision of chapter eight. It was more than he could bear. He was comforted by the reality that God was in control and that His kingdom would eventually come (v. 25b). But to know that there would be so much evil in the world and so much suffering for God’s people before it arrived was overwhelming. It was too much. At least...for a while.

Daniel's sickness passed. God's grace was sufficient. Regaining his strength, God's prophet got up and went back to work as he normally would, "he rose and went about the king's business." Sinclair Ferguson says it well, "He returned to the duties to which God had called him. He did not retire from the world in view of the evil days that were coming. Nor did he go to the opposite extreme and live on a "high" visionary excitement. Instead he did his duty.

Daniel's attitude illustrates an important biblical principle: In view of what the future holds, we must live holy lives now. He caught a glimpse of realities that would take place centuries later. Those events were shadows of the last conflict between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world. One day Christ will return and the Antichrist "shall be broken without human hands" just as Antiochus was. We know this from the New Testament. How then should we live? Passage after passage gives the same answer: Do the King's business; walk in obedience; live in holiness; purify yourself as He is pure. While riding to a preaching engagement one day, John Wesley was stopped by a stranger who asked him what he would do if he knew that Christ was going to return at noon the next day. Wesley reached into his saddlebag, retrieved his diary, read out his engagements for the rest of the day and for the morning of the next day, and said, "That, dear

sir, is what I would do.” His knowledge of the Lord’s future kingdom allowed him to live already for that kingdom. That was the spirit of Daniel. Is it so surprising that his life made such a lasting impression...?” (Ferguson, *Daniel*, The Preachers Com., 165).

The vision “greatly disturbed” him and “he could not understand it.”

Nevertheless, he did not let it paralyze him. He did his job and he trusted in his God. He is an example to all of us.

Conclusion: How does this text point to Christ?

Daniel 8 should be read in the light of Daniel 7 which speaks of Christ as the coming Son of Man, and Daniel 9 which speaks of Christ as “Messiah who will be cut off” (9:26). Doing so sheds light on the identity of “the Prince of the host” in 8:11 and “the Prince of princes” in 8:25. All four titles point to Christ, the one who will shatter the “insolent king” (8:23) but “not by human hands” (8:25). Parallels with the Prince of Daniel 8 and the Messiah Prince in the New Testament are helpfully highlighted by Sidney Greidanus when he writes, “The first major analogy is that both were attacked by evil people. “The Prince of the host” was attacked by the evil king (8:11, 25). Jesus was also attacked but much more severely. When Jesus was born, King Herod tried to kill him (Matt. 2:13); the devil tempted him three times (Matt 4:1-10); the people of his hometown of Nazareth tried to “hurl him off the cliff”

(Luke 4:28); “The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death” (Luke 22:2); Pilate had Jesus flogged and then “handed him over to be crucified” (Matt 27:26); the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus, “spat on him,” struck him on the head with a reed, and crucified him (Matt 27:30-35). Surely, the spirit of the Antichrist was at work attacking the Christ even during Jesus’ own lifetime.

The second major analogy is that the attacker will be destroyed. Daniel 8:25 declares that the evil king “shall even rise up against the Prince of princes. But he shall be broken, and not by human hands.” The implication is that “the Prince of princes” will break the evil king. This prediction was fulfilled when King Antiochus was destroyed. But it will find final fulfillment at Jesus’ Second Coming. Paul writes about the end of time: “Then the lawless one [the Antichrist] will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming” (2 Thess 2:8). (*Preaching Christ From Daniel*, 268).

To this helpful insight, David Helm rightly adds, “In his earthly ministry, Jesus entered the temple at a time of religious degradation and laid claim on restoring it to its rightful place (John 2:13-22) [contra Antiochus and his evil actions]... Jesus’ substitutionary death and resurrection put an

end to the need for morning and evening sacrifices once and for all
(Hebrews 10:1-18)...The final word is not had by the ram, or the goat, but
by the Lamb” (*Daniel For You*, 154-55).