

The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.
(Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.
(Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

The Ram, The Goat And The Little Horn

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Daniel 8

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Daniel 8; that's on page 745 in your pew Bibles. This is one of the most interesting chapters in all the Bible. In a sense, Daniel 8 – is very similar to Genesis chapter 2. If you are a Bible reader you will know Genesis 2 is basically a ZOOMED IN VERSION of Genesis 1. In Genesis 1 you get the story of creation generally – in Genesis 2 the focus ZOOMS IN to the story of the creation of the man and the woman in particular. Same story, much narrower focus – that is exactly what is going on here.

Daniel 8 is a ZOOMED IN version of Daniel 7 – which itself was just another version of the dream we encountered in Daniel 2. Thus we are becoming very familiar with all the main players in this series of visions. In Daniel 2 we had a statue made out of descending qualities of metal. The head of gold was Babylon. Following that we had silver representing Medo-Persia and then Bronze representing Greece and then IRON and CLAY representing the Empire of Rome. Those are the same 4 kingdoms that featured in the vision of the 4 beasts in Daniel 7 now here in Daniel 8 we are ZOOMING in on the conflict and chaos caused by the clash between these middle two kingdoms - Medo-Persia and Greece. As we focus in on this part of the story we notice the

emergence of “a little horn” – a future human ruler with a particular DEMONIC ANIMUS towards the saints of God.

Old Testament scholar Joyce Baldwin puts it this way:

“We are being introduced to a recurring historical phenomenon: the clever but ruthless world dictator, who stops at nothing in order to achieve his ambitions. The book proclaims that such rulers cannot ultimately succeed. Though they talk and act big, and though they cause great suffering to many, their end is sure.”¹

Notice that phrase: a recurring historical phenomenon.

So in Daniel chapter 8 we are hearing a story about a real person and a recurring historical pattern. Scholars refer to this as “prophetic telescoping”. It means “seeing the far future through the lens of a near future experience.”

That’s what is going on here.

Now because that is a little bit complicated – and because we are still getting used to the rhythm and feel of apocalyptic literature – my plan for this morning will be to read through the text slowly, according to its main divisions and then to ZOOM OUT in order to observe the patterns and principles that it contains.

The two main sections in the text I think are pretty self-evident. We have the story of the ram and the goat and then out of that comes the story of the little horn who hates and harasses the people of God.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

The Ram and The Goat:

¹ Joyce G. Baldwin, Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 23 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 180.

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first.

Let's just pause here in order to get our bearings. This vision came to Daniel in the third year of King Belshazzar. Now we remember that Belshazzar was the weak and pathetic king from Daniel 5 – the story of the writing on the wall. He was the king who was getting drunk while the Persians were diverting the Euphrates and entering the city of Babylon under the walls. Meaning, this vision came to Daniel during the decadent years of a dying empire.

So if you wanted to rearrange the Book of Daniel chronologically, you would rip out this chapter and tuck it right in before Daniel chapter 5 – that's where we are in the story.

We jump back into the text at verse 2:

² And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. ³ I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. ⁴ I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

⁵ As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶ He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. ⁷ I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. ⁸ Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. (Daniel 8:1–8 ESV)

Now, because this is really our third vision now dealing with the same players we are already well on our way to making sense of the symbols in this particular scene. However, we don't even have to make the attempt because once again, God graciously provides an angelic interpretation. We'll read the chapter slightly out of sequence just in order to set the interpretation directly beside the imagery that it is interpreting. Drop your eyes down just a few verses to verses 15-22.

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." ¹⁷ So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

¹⁸ And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up. ¹⁹ He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end. ²⁰ As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹ And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. ²² As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. (Daniel 8:15–22 ESV)

So GOD sends GABRIEL to interpret this vision and he tells Daniel that the RAM represents the kingdom of Medo-Persia. That was the meaning behind the two horns that the ram had – one significantly longer than the other. That's a perfect symbol for the Empire of the Medo-Persians. The Medo-Persian Empire began as an alliance between two UNEQUAL POWERS. The Persians were the MUCH BIGGER HORN. It would be like if the United States and Canada joined together to form an Empire –much as we love our country, we would have to admit that we would be the very junior partner in such an arrangement. So much so that later historians might not even bother to mention our contribution. So it is here. The Persians were the big player and in time it became common to simply speak of the PERSIAN EMPIRE. The angel says – the weird looking RAM is Medo-Persia. For a period of time he will run about the earth doing whatever he pleases. And that was certainly the case. The Persian Empire was a force to be reckoned with and they spread across the eastern world, greatly expanding and consolidating the former territories associated with the Babylonian Empire which it swallowed whole.

Next the angel tells Daniel that the GOAT is the Kingdom of Greece. So our puzzle is filling in here. We were told explicitly in Daniel 2 that the head of Gold – the first empire was the Babylonian Empire. Here are told that the second empire is the Medo-Persian Empire and the third Empire is the Greek Empire. That leaves only the 4th kingdom without an explicit interpretation although the text seems pretty clearly to indicate the 4th kingdom is the Empire of Rome.

But the focus here is on the CLASH between the two middle kingdoms – Persia and Greece. If you know anything about ancient history you know that this was one of the great conflicts of the era. This was their World War 2. If they made movies back then – this is what those movies would have been about. In fact this is what many of our movies are about. The movie 300 for example is about the attempt by the Persians to spread their Empire westward into Greece. Greece at the time wasn't really an empire, it was just a loose coalition of city states. But the threat of Persia caused them to come together, initially under Philip of Macedon, but then finally and climactically under Alexander the Great. He is the GREAT HORN of the Goat. He was a rare genius. He was a literary genius, a military genius, a social genius and a political genius – he literally conquered the world before his 30th birthday – but then as you likely know, at the height of his powers, when he was just 32 years old he contracted malaria and he died.

That's what the vision meant when it said:

“when he was strong, the great horn was broken” (Daniel 8:8 ESV)

That's exactly what happened to Alexander the Great. He died and his MASSIVE EMPIRE was divided into 4 lesser kingdoms – stretching to the four corners of the earth.

And that brings us to the second part of the story. Out of the fragments of this VAST empire, arose a LITTLE HORN. A subsequent king with a particular animus – a particular hatred – towards the people of God.

Lift your eyes up now to the recounting of that part of the vision in verses 9-14:

The Little Horn:

Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. ¹⁰ It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. ¹¹ It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. ¹² And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will

act and prosper. ¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” ¹⁴ And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.” (Daniel 8:9–14 ESV)

Now – once again, we are wonderfully helped by the interpretation provided by the angel Gabriel. Let’s read that now in verses 23-27 – and with those verses we will have read the whole chapter.

Verse 23:

And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise.

Let’s just pause here – I’m not sure that’s a great translation. Antiochus IV Epiphanes may well have understood riddles, I don’t know, but I think the better sense of that idiom is given by Old Testament scholar Andrew Hill. He says the expression means that Antiochus was a “master of intrigue”². That makes better sense of the language and it accords perfectly with what we know of Antiochus from history.

We jump back into the text at verse 24:

²⁴ His power shall be great—but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. ²⁵ By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand. ²⁶ The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now.” ²⁷ And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king’s business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it. (Daniel 8:23–27 ESV)

² Andrew E. Hill, *Daniel* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised Edition Volume 8*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 154.

So the angel tells Daniel that out of the ruins of the once Great Greek Empire a kinglet shall arise – but not by his own power. He will be a puppet – a front – for our ancient foe. His rampage of hate and destruction will be DEMONICALLY EMPOWERED – and likewise, his sudden destruction will be DIVINELY ORDAINED. This is a vision FOR THE FUTURE and Daniel was overcome and lay sick for many days.

Now, as I said, the reason for this third telling of the same basic story – though here from a different magnification – is to make us familiar with the general pattern and principle of antichrist. As I quoted from Baldwin earlier:

“We are being introduced to a recurring historical phenomenon”³

This is a pattern – a cycle – that repeats and grows over time until finally culminating in the last GREAT OPPOSER – the last GREAT ANTICHRIST – who hates and harasses the people of God.

Now, we’re not relying on one Old Testament scholar for that understanding of things – we’re not relying on any Old Testament scholar – this is what the New Testament says about this phenomenon. The Apostle John in 1 John 2:18 says:

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.” (1 John 2:18 ESV)

So John says, “We’re waiting for the next Antichrist – THE ANTICHRIST – and he will follow the pattern of all those who have come before.”

That’s why we are interested in this story – we need to know the pattern of all those who have come before if we are to recognize the one who is still to come.

Now, as I said last week, we are planning to do an Excursus Type sermon at the end of this series looking at the issue of Antichrist as a whole – Old Testament and New – but first we have to deal

³ Joyce G. Baldwin, Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 23 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 180.

with each of the passages in Daniel that contribute to that theme – and of those, this is by far the most important. So having now read the story and having heard the interpretation given by Gabriel, we are prepared now to make some initial comments about the pattern and principle of antichrist.

Pattern And Principles:

The first thing we would want to say is this:

1. The antichrist arises out of the clash and chaos of empires

In his vision Daniel is transported outside of the empire of Babylon. Look at verse 2. Daniel says that in his vision he was transported as it were to the citadel in Susa which was in the province of Elam – and that is very interesting because when Daniel received this vision that city was not part of the Babylonian Empire. But it became one of the royal cities in the Persian Empire. You see, Daniel is seeing the future and in the future Babylon will no longer exist. He is being taken out of his context in order to see a conflict that is coming – a conflict OUT OF WHICH will emerge a subsequent human leader with a particular demonic animus toward the people of God.

That's the pattern.

So if Daniel lived today it would be as if he were lifted out America and transported to the city of Istanbul in modern day Turkey: the city where Europe and Asia meet. And from that vantage point – with America having been destroyed or in some way supplanted – he sees a vision of a clash between two NEW EMPIRES – out of the ashes of which will arise a human leader bent on the destruction of the kingdom of God.

Now to be clear – I am not making a prediction – AT ALL - I am just lifting the paradigm out of the Bible and dropping it down into a different historical context so that we see and identify the pattern.

Antichrist emerges out of the clash and chaos of empires.

The second thing I think we can say here is that:

2. The antichrist is a front for deeper and darker spiritual realities

We saw that in verse 24:

His power shall be great—**but not by his own power**; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. (Daniel 8:24 ESV)

So this little horn – this human leader – was animated by an otherworldly power. There is more going on here than just the rise and fall of human empires. This little horn assaults even the host of heaven!! In verse 10 the text says:

It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them.¹¹ It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. (Daniel 8:10–11 ESV)

Iain Duguid says usefully here:

“Antiochus was not simply at war against the earthly saints, but against the heavenly host as well...It is as if the curtain is drawn back and behind Antiochus we see the ominous power of the spiritual forces of darkness arrayed against our God.”⁴

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6. In Ephesians 6:11-12 he says:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:11–12 ESV)

Do you see that? Our real enemy is not Caesar of Rome – NERO is just a front for our demonic foe, Paul says. Different mask – same dark power. That’s the idea.

⁴ Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel* in the Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 129.

Antiochus – animated by demonic hate – engages in a multilevel conflict – a conflict that reaches as high even – as the host of heaven – even up to the Prince of the Host of heaven – now who is that? Some scholars say it is Michael – the leader of the army of God – some say it is God himself. We can't be sure – and it doesn't really matter – the point is that this little horn begins to believe great things about himself. You've heard me say the name of this original little horn several times now – Antiochus IV Epiphanes. That last bit – Epiphanes – was a nickname he gave himself. It means – the very manifestation of God.

This is a man – animated by the spirit of the devil – who has set himself against Almighty God. He speaks arrogant things and he makes war even with the host of heaven.

The third thing we can say here is that:

3. The antichrist opposes the worship of God's people

In verses 11-12 the text says:

It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown.¹² And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression (Daniel 8:11–12 ESV)

So it seems as though in the course of this cosmic conflict, the little horn was able to take away the regular burnt offering from the prince of the host – that inclines me to understand “the Prince of the Host” as referring to Michael or whichever other angel was in charge of the angelic army. The devil does not win battles over God – period. So the horn here appears to wrest control of the worship of the temple away from the angel who was charged with protecting it – that seems to be what the passage is saying.

Scholars of course equate this with the infamous actions of Antiochus against the people of Israel in 167 BC. By this point in history, many of the Jews were back in the land – having been released and resourced by Cyrus the Persian. In the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah we read about their return and the rebuilding of the temple. But here – many years later – Antiochus IV Epiphanes attempts

to completely eradicate their worship and religion. He forbade circumcision and in 167 BC he profaned the temple by introducing a sacred object - which appears to have been some kind of meteor - and he sacrificed a pig to it on the holy altar. This is the event that is referred to in the New Testament as “the abomination of desolation”.

He also destroyed every copy of the bible he could get his hands on. That’s our fourth observation:

4. The antichrist throws down the truth of God

This story is recounted in 1 Maccabees. As Protestants we don’t consider this book to be CANONICAL – that is Holy Scripture – but we do consider it good history and it very helpful here. In 1 Maccabees 1:56-57 we are told:

The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire.⁵⁷ Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. (1 Maccabees 1:56–57 NRSV)

The antichrist cannot tolerate rival authority. He hates and throws down the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

But the good news is, as I’ve said many times before, that the devil is a dog on a chain – and that is the 5th and final thing that we need to say about his puppet the antichrist.

5. The antichrist is a dog on a chain

In verse 13 Daniel overhears two angels talking. One angel asks the other how long this state of affairs will be allowed to persist. Daniel wants to know the answer too and he is told:

“For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.” (Daniel 8:14 ESV)

2300 mornings and evenings is 1150 days which is roughly 3 and a half years – which is the same number we encountered in chapter 7. It becomes a symbolic way of saying – for a short but determined time.

Antiochus's reign of terror over Israel actually did last about 3.5 years – but we are interested not just in the first iteration of this pattern but in the pattern itself. What we are being told here is that from time to time, God will give limited permission to a human agent to persecute and harass the saints of God.

But.

As soon as God's purpose has been established, that leash will be withdrawn and that agent will be judged and destroyed.

The devil is a dog on a chain.

And like any dog on a chain – any rabid dog on a chain – he bites everything and everyone he can sink his teeth into.

But God is the one holding the chain. He lets it out and he gathers it in and he turns it this way and that according to his purpose.

Which of course, begs the question: what purposes could God have in an episode such as this?

Two potential purposes come to mind. The first one is hinted at in verse 12.

And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering **because of transgression** (Daniel 8:12 ESV)

So the LOSS of worship that is prophesied here is tied to the sin and transgression of God's people. They abused the worship – they perverted the worship – they neglected the worship – and thus, the worship is temporarily taken away from them.

That certainly seems to be how Daniel understood the vision – because in the next chapter we find him praying a prayer of national repentance unto God. Daniel connecting the dots between the sin and the leash and thus he prayed his prayer of confession – we'll talk more about that next week.

So that's one potential purpose - but I think there is another that is hinted at in verse 14. In verse 14 the angel says that the permission of the little horn will last:

“For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.” (Daniel 8:14 ESV)

When they are given back the worship they treat it and conduct it as they should. The season of difficulty and tribulation functions as a refiner's fire.

You see the bible promises that God's tests and trials are never intended to destroy us – rather they are intended to RESTORE US – to make us again who we were created and intended to be. So the little horn is given just enough rope to do his job – a job he does not even know that he is doing. His job is to chasten and purify. His job is to drive away the feckless and the false. His job is to stimulate faith, HOPE, humility and endurance. And when he has done his job, his leash will be withdrawn; the horn will be destroyed and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign – and WE WITH HIM - forever, and ever – amen.

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.