

A Ram, a Goat and a Little Horn

Daniel 8

The Bible is anchored in historical, objective events that have really happened. Think about the gospel of Jesus Christ by which we are saved. We look back in history to the cross of Christ where our Lord died for our sins. We look back to the empty tomb where Jesus was raised from the dead. We read the history of the Jewish people in the Old Testament and of the church in the book of Acts and the Epistles. All of these past events and messages from God give us foundations for believing and living as Christians.

But in another sense, our inspiration to persevere as disciples of Christ also rests on things that the Bible says will occur in the future. We know them as certainly as we know the things that have already transpired. We are sustained through the trials of this life not only by remembering the history of our faith, but also by hope in what God promises us in the future. Those of you who have been coming to our Wednesday Bible Study and Prayer meeting know that we have seen both of these emphases in our study of 1 Peter.

Peter, in his first epistle writes to encourage believers who are facing fiery trials of many kinds. He writes in 1 Peter 1:3, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."** That is the historical reality, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because of that real event we have a hope for living. We are anchored by that historical, objective truth.

But then in the very next verse Peter also points us to the future, **"to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."** (1Pet. 1:4-5). Our hope not only rests on the historical truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also looks forward to the glorious return of our Lord, to the vindication of the righteous, and to our inheritance with Christ in heaven.

By both of these types of scripture, history and prophecy, we are strengthened to deal with today's trials, persecutions, temptations, and sorrows. As we have seen already, the book of Daniel is both history and prophecy. The first six chapters of Daniel tell the history of the lives of Daniel and his friends who trusted God before kings, in the fiery furnace, in the lions' den. Under extreme circumstances they believed God and stood firm. We were encouraged to live faithfully as we saw their faith and courage lived out in real history.

The second half of the book of Daniel, however, is mostly prophecy. It tells about the visions that Daniel had of the future. Some of the things he saw and was told about, which were future to him, have occurred by now; others are still to come. These prophecies in Daniel are written for our encouragement and hope.

The message of the book of Daniel has been consistent and powerfully conveyed in every chapter: God is Sovereign over all. All the kings and kingdoms of this

world are in His hand to do with as He wills according to His purposes and for His glory.

In chapter 7 Daniel told about his vision of the four beasts, four kingdoms of men that would rise and rule one after another until finally they are all destroyed by God and the eternal kingdom is given to Christ and His saints. Now in chapter 8 Daniel sees another vision that gives us a more detailed look at two those four kingdoms that were in the future for Daniel, but are history for us.

We'll find this helpful for our own discipleship, because here we encounter not just the saints who have to face the final conflict, but the saints like us who have to face today's conflict: seeing the power of evil seemingly winning and being called to faithfulness in our Father's business.

The Structure of the Text

Verses 1 and 2 are the introduction to the vision Daniel received; verses 3-8 describe Daniel's vision of the ram and the goat. The rising up and reign of the "little horn" are recorded in verses 9-14. Verses 15-19 introduce the angel, Gabriel, who is instructed to convey the meaning of the vision to Daniel. Verses 20 and 21 are the interpretation of the vision of verses 3-8, and verses 22-26 are the interpretation of verses 9-14. An account of Daniel's response to the vision in verse 27 concludes the chapter.

(1) Daniel's Second Vision (Dan. 8:1-14)

- Introduction (1-2)
- The Ram and the Goat (3-8)
- The "Little Horn" (9-14)

(2) Interpretation of Daniel's Vision (Dan. 8:15-27)

- Introducing Gabriel (15-19)
- Meaning of the Ram and Goat (20-21)
- Meaning of the "Little Horn" (22-26)
- Daniel's Response (27)

Let's look at the text now in Daniel 8. First we have the:

Introduction of Daniel's Second Vision (1-2)

1 In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me--to me, Daniel--after the one that appeared to me the first time.

2 I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which *is* in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai.

The scene in chapter 8 is set two years after the vision in chapter 7 took place, which was during the first year of Belshazzar's reign. In the third year of Belshazzar's reign Cyrus the Persian consolidated his power and began taking action that would lead to the establishment of the Medo-Persian Empire, which

would eventually overthrow Babylon. So in the year Daniel was given this vision, important developments were occurring in the balance of power among the nations.

Daniel tells us in verse 2 that his vision transported him both in time and space, as he found himself in Susa, the ancient capital of Elam. Susa was destined in a few years to become the location of the king's palace in the Persian Empire and where we find both Nehemiah and Esther in the future (see Nehemiah 1:1; Esther 1:2, 5: 2:3, 5).

Next, Daniel tells us what he saw there:

The Ram and the Goat (3-8)

3 Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns *were* high; but one *was* higher than the other, and the higher *one* came up last.

4 I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor *was there any* that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.

5 And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat *had* a notable horn between his eyes.

6 Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power.

7 And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand.

8 Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.

In verses 20-22 Gabriel will interpret this part of the vision for Daniel: "**The ram which you saw, having the two horns--*they are* the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat *is* the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that *is* between its eyes *is* the first king. As for the broken *horn* and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.**"

In his vision Daniel found himself in the city of Susa on the eastern edge of the Babylonian Empire. He looked east to where the power of Persia was gathering, and eventually this two-horned ram, Medo-Persia, the empire that would succeed Babylon, carried the day. The first horn would be Media and the second Persia, coming later than the first and being more powerful. It butted its way north, south, and west and took over the known world. It became a great power, nothing could stand in its way.

From other places in scripture we know that God used the Medo-Persian empire to begin the return of the Jews from exile to their land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Lord's temple. When the Medo-Persian kingdom had served its purpose, it was overcome by Greece.

This Grecian goat came from the west, moving so swiftly it was as if its feet didn't touch the ground. It had a single dramatic horn growing out from the middle of its head. It was so terrible that it utterly destroyed the once great ram.

History gives us the name of the great horn of this Greek goat, its first king Alexander the Great. Yet strikingly, after he had conquered the world, at thirty-two years of age his life was forfeit. He probably died in the Palace of Babylon from the combined effects of high consumption of alcohol and malaria. Four of his generals eventually took over a quadrant of his empire.

The four generals who each ruled a quadrant of Alexander's dominion gave their names to their respective, smaller kingdoms. One of these, the Seleucid Empire, was the region that comprised Syria as well as Canaan, the Promised Land of the people of God. Some generations later the Seleucid Empire would have a terrible ruler. Daniel saw him next in this prophetic dream.

The Little Horn (9-14)

9 And 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 And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down *some* of the host and *some* of the stars to the ground, and trampled them.

11 He even exalted *himself* as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily *sacrifices* were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down.

12 Because of transgression, an army was given over *to the horn* to oppose the daily *sacrifices*; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did *all this* and prospered.

13 Then I heard a holy one speaking; and *another* holy one said to that certain *one* who was speaking, "How long *will* the vision *be*, *concerning* the daily *sacrifices* and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?"

14 And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

The little horn that would grow up out of one of the four remnants of Alexander's empire would wreak destruction among the people of God, who by then would be once again residing in the Promised Land and worshiping in the temple. This figure of violence, self-regard, and hatred of God and of his people is clearly known to us in history. He is Antiochus IV, known as Antiochus Epiphanes. The

events described here have their fulfillment during his time. Chapter 11 will go into more detail about Antiochus, his battles and his arrogance.

Antiochus hated the truth of God; he threw it to the ground. History records that he actively attempted to destroy the scrolls of the Scriptures. Antiochus was a terrible person who had a visceral hatred for the people of God. He butchered them and killed children indiscriminately. He took a sow and had it slaughtered, ripped down the curtain to the holy of holies in the temple, marched in with the sow, and spread its blood all over the holiest place where God would be worshiped. He laughed at the agony of the Jews and trampled on their leaders. He proclaimed Zeus to be God and Yahweh to be foolish.

The "little horn" seems to change before our eyes, from a mortal man to an incarnation of Satan himself. The focus seems to shift from the Israelites, Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple, to the "host of heaven" and the "stars of heaven." Are these angels as they seem to be in Revelation 12? This prophecy suggests that there is more going on here than meets the eye. Little wonder then that Bible students differ greatly about the meaning of these verses.

Verses 10 and 11 could give the impression that the little horn takes on God and wins. The reality verse 12 tells us is that the "host of heaven" is "given over to the horn," not because of the horn's greatness, but "on account of transgression." The "horn" is granted a period of time to rebel against God and to succeed, not because he is stronger than God, but because his rebellion is a part of the purpose of God. His reign is divinely purposed and permitted so that God's indignation may be poured out on a sinful people. The sins of the Jews seem to be in view here, for it is against the Jews and against Jerusalem that this king pours out his wrath.

Apparently an angel, identified as a "holy one," speaks up, and Daniel overhears the conversation. The first angel asks how long this transgression and defilement of the holy place and the oppression of the host will go on. Verse 14 answers this question: it will last for 2,300 evenings and mornings, and then the holy place will be restored properly.

What a terrifying vision Daniel saw. He now gets some help in interpreting it.

The Angel Gabriel to Interpret (15-19)

15 Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly 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, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this *man* understand the vision."

17 So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision *refers* to the time of the end."

18 Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright.

19 And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end *shall be*.

Daniel, the man so gifted in understanding and interpreting visions and dreams, is completely baffled and seeks to understand the meaning of the vision he has seen. An angel who looked like a man was standing by Daniel in his vision. A voice from between the banks of the Ulai called out to the one standing by Daniel. He called the angel by name—Gabriel. This is the first time in the Old Testament an angel is identified by name. The voice instructs Gabriel to explain the meaning of the vision to Daniel.

Three times in this chapter it is stated that the vision pertains to the end (verses 17, 19, 26). The question is, what end does it refer to? In the story of this blasphemer Antiochus I believe there is also a foreshadowing of the antichrist, the “man of lawlessness,” who is yet to come, and who will act similarly. Though the final little horn is related in history to the fourth beast of Daniel 7, his nature and exploits are not different from the little horn here in chapter 8.

What drives Antiochus will drive his eventual successor. Jesus uses this vision that predicted what Antiochus would do in the temple to explain that there was one still coming who would do the same thing on a grander scale, with greater violence and more successful hatred of God (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14). So Daniel was being told about things that would happen in the third kingdom, and it was like what would happen at the end.

Gabriel then gives us the interpretation:

Meaning of the Ram and Goat (20-21)

20 "The ram which you saw, having the two horns--*they are* the kings of Media and Persia.

21 "And the male goat *is* the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that *is* between its eyes *is* the first king.

Two little verses on Media-Persia and Alexander of Greece. The real emphasis in the chapter is on the little horn.

Meaning of the Little Horn (22-26)

22 "As for the broken *horn* and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.

23 "And in the latter time of their kingdom, When the transgressors have reached their fullness, A king shall arise, Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes.

24 His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, And shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty, and *also* the holy people.

25 "Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt *himself* in his heart. He shall destroy many in

their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; But he shall be broken without human means.

26 "And the vision of the evenings and mornings Which was told is true; Therefore seal up the vision, For *it refers to many days in the future.*"

While verses 23-26 describe the actions of this king, their primary focus is his character. Arrogant, cunning, and deceptive, he is powerful, but "not by his own power." He is so wicked and evil that it becomes apparent someone is behind him, someone greater than he, granting him power and expanding his pride. The source of this power can be no other than Satan himself.

This king will evidence the same pride which characterizes Satan. He will deceive and destroy "to an extraordinary degree." He will be a master of destruction. His destruction will be all the greater because in some way he will put men at ease, bringing about their destruction when they do not expect it. His destruction will come upon him as unexpectedly as that which he brought on others, but not by any human agency. If the ram was subdued by the goat, this "horn" will be destroyed by God.

Gabriel's final words provide instructions for Daniel concerning his vision: the vision is true and reliable and the events are certain to take place. But they are events in the distant future, long after Daniel's death.

Finally we see:

Daniel's Response (27)

27 And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.

Daniel paid a high price for receiving this vision. He received a revelation he could not understand, a vision he must keep to himself. If this were not enough, the experience so drained his strength that he lay sick and exhausted for days. If this message has left you with more questions than answers, know that you are in good company. Even Daniel had trouble with it.

God's purpose in revealing the vision to Daniel was not to enable him to completely understand the future before it happened nor is it His purpose for revealing this vision to us. Prophecy has never been fully understood in advance, nor will it ever be so. Prophecy is given so that we might be encouraged knowing that the same God who was sovereign over the past is sovereign over the future. It gives us a certainty, a hope for living a faithful life following Christ Jesus our Lord.

What can we conclude from chapter 8?

God is sovereign and in control of this world even when evil seems to triumph. Evil rulers have come and will come. History will repeat itself many times from Daniel's day to the end of the world. Many antichrists are in the world. And the temptation to shrink back and our call for courage are the same over and over again. But God places a limit on what evil can do. Antiochus was given

2,300 evenings and mornings, not a day more. The angels knew when he would be called on the carpet and cast into hell for his arrogance.

Be strengthened by the prophetic word. We should be more faithful as disciples knowing these things, not fearful, withdrawn, or apathetic. God will put an end to evil men and the suffering they cause.

Be faithful in the king's business. Once again Daniel gives us an example of faithfulness to imitate. And what an example - despite the mysterious nature of the vision, Daniel faithfully went back to the daily task which God had ordained provided for him. Daniel didn't let either spiritual mysteries or physical weakness keep him from doing his duty. This shows us that our interest in prophecy should make us more about our king's business, not less about it.

It sounds a lot like what Peter exhorts us to do in light of current trials and future hope,

1Peter 1:13-15: 13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,

Get ready and get busy doing the good work that God has ordained for us in this present age while we wait expectantly for the blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.