

# 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 Little Horn**

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**Daniel 8**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Daniel 8.

I mentioned last week that, as we move from the first six chapters of Daniel to the concluding six chapters, we are moving from narrative to apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is filled with dreams, visions, signs and images and it presents a real challenge for us as western readers.

Here in chapter 8, Daniel receives another dream that essentially “zooms in” on the dream that he received in chapter 7. By way of reminder, last week we studied Daniel’s dream in which he saw four kingdoms which we believe to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome respectively. Out of the fourth kingdom – Rome – Daniel saw that ten kings would arise followed by a final wicked king which was symbolized by a little horn.

In today’s vision, we are zooming in on the second and third kingdoms – the Medo-Persians and the Greeks – and we are then zooming in even further to one king in particular who will arise out of the Greek empire and who will persecute the people of God. His name is Antiochus IV and he was unique in his depravity. He gave to himself the title Antiochus IV Epiphanes which roughly means “Antiochus – god manifest.” He thought of himself as god in the flesh. The function of chapter 8 is to draw our attention to this wicked ruler who serves as a “type” of the antichrists who will follow.

As we have done in previous weeks, we’re going to walk through this text slowly, explaining the difficult details that we encounter as we go along. I’ve broken this chapter into two main groupings: The ram and the goat, and the little horn.

Look with me now at Daniel, chapter 8. Hear now God's holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

## The Ram & The Goat

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. <sup>2</sup> 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. (Daniel 8:1-2 ESV)

Let's stop right there and take this opportunity to remind ourselves of the context for this vision. Last week's vision came to Daniel in the first year of Belshazzar's reign. This vision comes two years later. By way of reminder, who can tell me which Kingdom Belshazzar reigned over? Yes, at the time of this vision, Daniel is still living in the kingdom of the Babylonians. Now, notice that Daniel is taken to Susa, which was the capital of Elam. Daniel is taken *out of Babylon* to receive a vision that will focus in on the empires that will follow Babylon. Let's listen now to the vision of the ram and the goat, beginning in verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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 8:3-8 ESV)

Now, we're going to do something a little different this morning. I want you to skip ahead to verse 15. We would typically read this chapter in order, but the interpretation of this vision is made explicit by the angel Gabriel. I think it would be helpful for clarity sake just to jump ahead and read that now. What are we meant to see in the ram and the goat? Look with me at verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."

<sup>17</sup> 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."

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and

Persia. <sup>21</sup> And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. <sup>22</sup> 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)

Perhaps you noticed that in previous weeks I was careful to say, “now, scholars *think* this kingdom represents so and so.” Yet, today, I’ve been speaking more directly. Well, that is because today’s text comes right out and *names* the kingdoms in question! The ram in this vision has two horns, but one horn is significantly larger than the other. Gabriel tells us: “This is the kingdom of Medo-Persia.” Just like the bear who was lifted up on one side in last week’s vision, this kingdom is characterized by its imbalance in power. Within this historical alliance, the Persians possessed the power and the Medes essentially came along for the ride.

The goat who crushes the Medo-Persian empire is identified by the angel Gabriel as Greece. At the time of Greece’s conquests, she was led by one superior king. While he’s not explicitly named in this text, we know this king to be Alexander the Great. His conquest of the Ancient Near-Eastern world was nothing short of remarkable. When Alexander died at the age of 32, his kingdom was divided between his four generals – the Diadochi – and they wrestled over control of their territories for the extent of their reign.

This is now the third time in the book of Daniel that we have been introduced to these kingdoms. However, as we mentioned at the beginning, the function of today’s text is to zoom in on a king who emerged from the wreckage of the Greek empire. Look with me now at verse 9 where we are introduced to the little horn:

## The Little Horn

<sup>9</sup> Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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?” <sup>14</sup> 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)

This “little horn” of chapter 8 throws down the stars. He considers himself to be as great as God Himself. He ends the burnt offerings to God and overthrows the sanctuary. In the midst of his oppression, the people of God cry out: “How long?!” But his reign is numbered.

This little horn is Antiochus IV Epiphanes – the Seleucid ruler who arose out of the divided Greek empire. Antiochus was determined to Hellenize his kingdom. He wanted to make his subjects Greek. And in the Jews, he found a people who were distinctly and irritatingly NOT GREEK. He hated that, and he persecuted them accordingly. He will feature prominently in chapter 10 as well because his reign provided a foretaste of the oppression that the people of God will experience under the antichrist. We’re going to unpack that later, but for now let’s jump ahead to verse 23:

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.”

<sup>27</sup> 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)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Just like all of the tyrants before him, Antiochus' oppressive reign was eventually ended. History tells us that he died of some sort of illness that eventually caused him to collapse out of his chariot. The king who thought he was the manifestation of god was knocked out of his chariot by no human hand. He was prideful, he was powerful, but he was not permanent.

That is the vision of Daniel 8.

Now, let's ask ourselves a very important question: Why is this chapter included in the Bible?

The biggest hint as to the significance of this passage is the title “the little horn.” If you were paying close attention last week, then you will remember that there was a “little horn” in chapter 7 as well. In chapter 7, this horn was representative of a king who would arise out of the *fourth* kingdom. The horn in chapter 7 appeared to represent a final, powerful Antichrist figure who will appear in the final days.

However, the little horn in today's chapter clearly arises out of the *third* kingdom. He came during the reign of the Greeks, and then he died. The symbolism is the same, but the setting makes it clear that these are two different entities.

Same title. Different people. What are we supposed to make of that? One commentator suggests:

The only really plausible explanation, therefore, is that the little horn arising from the third kingdom serves as a prototype of the little horn of the fourth Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

I think that is EXACTLY what we are meant to see. The vision of chapter 7 presented a world overview that culminated in the arrival of a ruler who will rise above the rest with regard to his wickedness and his power. Here, in chapter 8, this vision is ZOOMING IN on the second and third kingdoms in order to introduce us to a ruler who we should see as a PROTOTYPE – as a FORETASTE – of the persecutor who is still yet to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Daniel – Minor Prophets)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 7, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 99.

Last week we identified a pattern of persecution that will persist to the end. In today's text, Daniel is ZOOMING IN on the persecutor himself and he is presenting Antiochus IV Epiphanes as a TYPE of the many antichrists that will follow and of the final "capital A" Antichrist that is still to come. The Bible teaches us that there will be many antichrists who will rise up. The Apostle John says, for example:

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

Do you hear that? Many antichrists have arisen to wage war against the saints. The returned exiles lived under the antichrist Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The saints living in Peter's church lived under the antichrist Nero. The Jews in the second world war lived under the antichrist Hitler. Each of them was like a puppet that was animated by the enemy himself.

So, what is the purpose of this text? Daniel is inviting us to see in the reign of Aniochus IV Epiphanes a portrait of the antichrist.

### **A Portrait of the Antichrist**

First of all, we learn that:

#### **1. He is a front for deeper and darker spiritual realities**

In this chapter, Daniel uses language and images that appear to represent both earthly and heavenly realities. For example, in verse 10 we read:

And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. (Daniel 8:10b ESV)

If I were to ask you after your first reading who the "stars" are in this verse, I suspect that many of you would guess that the stars are angels. However, in chapter 12, Daniel uses this same language to describe the saints. In Daniel 12:3 we read:

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 12:3 ESV)

So, do the stars represent the people of God? Or do the stars represent angelic forces? You can find a commentary that would argue either side, but I would argue that we ought to see BOTH! The earthly battle and the heavenly battle are simultaneous. One commentator put it this way:

When believers are hurt, heaven is hurt. At this point, whatever might have seemed to be the case earlier in the vision, it was clear that heaven and earth are not two disconnected, discontinuous worlds. Each underlies the other. Heaven cannot but be involved with earth, earth with heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps to some of us that feels a little too spiritual, but the Book of Daniel is unapologetically spiritual! In chapter 10, we are introduced to an angel who was sent to Daniel but who got tangled

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<sup>2</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 221.

up along the way in a battle with the Prince of Persia and couldn't break free until the angel Michael came to back him up. This book presents a SPIRITUAL REALITY that, quite frankly, many North American Christians willfully ignore.

But we would be fools to ignore these spiritual realities because, as Daniel describes this antichrist figure, he tells us:

His power shall be great—**but not by his own power** (Daniel 8:24a ESV)

Do you hear that? His power shall be great – but not by his own power! There is a demonic power that animates this antichrist prototype. He is like a puppet that is used by the enemy to destroy the people of God. These antichrist figures – these men who are animated by the power of the evil one – are waging a spiritual battle. This is why the Apostle Paul saw fit to remind us:

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 6:12 ESV)

There is more going on than meets the eye. When Antiochus was persecuting the Jews and desecrating the temple, it was more than a physical assault. It was the tip of an iceberg. It was a front for deeper and darker spiritual realities.

The second lesson that we learn in this text is that:

## **2. He actively opposes the worship of God**

This is where the distinction between a bad leader and an antichrist leader becomes more evident. Did you notice that Daniel saw many mighty beasts in his visions, and yet there are only two that he identifies as being particularly noteworthy? Meaning – let's be careful that we're not throwing around the title antichrist every time we meet a king who makes life harder for Christians. Nebuchadnezzar burnt down the temple, but Daniel doesn't picture him as an antichrist. Nor does he give this distinction to Cyrus or Darius. In fact, in ALL OF SCRIPTURE there are really only two men in history who are identified in this way. Daniel highlights Antiochus IV Epiphanes and, in Revelation, John uses language that seems to cast Nero in the same light. MEANING when we look at the rule of these two kings what we find is not just two bad rulers – we find two DEMONIC rulers. We find two rulers who paint a picture of kings who are animated by the devil himself. And one of the PRIMARY characteristics of these antichrist figures is that they actively oppose the worship of God.

That's exactly what Antiochus did. He shut down the morning and evening sacrifices at the temple. In 1 and 2 Maccabees, an apocryphal book that is not authoritative but that is helpful for history's sake, we learn that he also burned the Jewish bibles. In 167 B.C. in an act of brazen defiance, Antiochus entered the re-constructed temple and he built there an altar to Zeus. To put an exclamation point on his war against God, he sacrificed a pig on the altar. This infamous act is referred to by the Jews as the "the abomination that makes desolate" and we see this language picked up by Jesus in the New Testament.

This was not just a bad king. This was a king who SET HIMSELF UP IN OPPOSITION TO GOD. One commentator notes:

The little horn, in reaching for the stars, is claiming equality with God.<sup>3</sup>

Those kings will come. Not regularly – we see only two in the time frame of the Bible – but from time to time an antichrist will rise onto the scene. One of the marks of such a king will be his persistent war against the worship of God. That is his M.O. as it were, and that is the example that we find in today's text.

Next, we learn here that:

### **3. He often appears to have the upper hand**

Look back at 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)

Are you seeing that? *He shall succeed in what he does!*

We talked off the top about how this chapter is written to prepare us for the arrival of the antichrists. This lesson right here is KEY if we are going to stand for Christ.

Can you imagine how unsettling it would have been for the faith of the Jews when Antiochus set up the alter to Zeus in the temple? How unsettling must it have been for the church in Rome when Nero began to use Christians as human torches in his garden? Can you imagine how difficult it would have been to hold onto faith in the God of Abraham for the Jews who were starving in the death camps under Hitler?

This text is for THAT circumstance! This text is meant to shape and warn us because for all we know we might someday be in that situation! What will we do when this demonic king – this antichrist figure – looks for all the world to have the upper hand?

Daniel 8 reminds us to stay the course. It reminds us that God is still on his throne, even when we are dealt the death blow. This is why we sing old songs. One song that we ought to sing more often says:

For still our ancient foe, would seek to work us woe  
The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still  
His kingdom is forever!<sup>4</sup>

You can only sing like that if you learn the fourth lesson that we find in today's text and that is:

### **4. He will not have the final word**

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<sup>3</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 157.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.

Daniel is seeing all of these patterns – he’s looking at this picture of the persecutor – and he asks the angel Gabriel: “How long? How long will the enemy trample the courts of God?” We find the answer in verse 14:

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

Now, the Israelites offered one sacrifice in the morning and one in the evening so to miss 2,300 sacrifices the persecution would have to last for about 3 and a half years. That is a common number in the Bible to represent a long but specified time.

Hear this: The antichrist may appear to have the upper hand for a season, but he will not have the final word. His reach is limited. He is a dog on a chain. Though he appears frightening from our perspective, I am reminded of the glimpse into the heavenly realm that we received in chapter 7:

“I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. (Daniel 7:11 ESV)

Do you see that? The little horn is running his mouth and, in the middle of his speech, he is destroyed and given over to the fire. Today’s text is meant to prepare us for the arrival of the antichrist, but it is also meant to RIGHT-SIZE our estimation of him. Did you notice that he is always referred to as “the little horn”? The little horn with a big mouth. That’s the antichrist. He’s nothing more than a glorified puppet for the devil.

If you’ve ever read the Chronicles of Narnia series than you already have a perfect illustration of this in your mind. In the final book of the series, there is an ape who hates Aslan and who wants to usurp Aslan’s authority. No one will listen to him, of course, because he is an ape and Aslan is a powerful lion. But one day, he has a brilliant idea. He dresses his clueless donkey friend in a lion outfit and convinces Narnia that the donkey is Aslan. The ape did all the talking, but whenever the people got out of line, he would march the dressed up donkey out before the crowd so that they would fall back in line.

That is a brilliant illustration! The antichrist is nothing more than a donkey who does his master’s bidding. He is a small horn with a big mouth! When the antichrist is brought up in the Bible he is mocked! He is a pretender at his very nature. He is no more than a puppet for his master.

AND! The glorious, beautiful, plot-twisting lesson in this passage is that while the antichrist THINKS he is doing the bidding of his master, he is ultimately accomplishing God’s purposes. Look again at verse 12:

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

The antichrist doesn’t TAKE authority. It is given to him. And in the context of Daniel 8, the authority is given to him *because of transgression*. The sins of God’s people – the neglected worship, the half-hearted offerings – needed to be addressed. This is why chapter 9 begins with Daniel’s desperate prayers of repentance! Daniel understood that God was using this donkey dressed up as a lion to purify the church, and he sought another way.



But there was no other way. A period of persecution was exactly what the church needed to wake up out of her apathy and to take seriously her task to be the image bearers of the God of the universe.

This, by the way, is EXACTLY what Peter saw when the antichrist Nero was preparing to harass God's people. Peter wrote to his church and said:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,<sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes **though it is tested by fire**—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV)

Peter wrote to the church and said: “We can REJOICE! Even in the presence of our enemy! Because this trial – this tyrant – is working for our good! God is allowing this fire to come and through it He is purifying this church.”

This is why, as a modern example, the church in China is an unstoppable force. You throw one pastor in prison and ten more pastors rise up from the congregation to start house churches. They're not afraid of the little horn because they know that God is on His throne.

God knows what it will take to purify His people, and if a dog on a chain – if the antichrist himself – can apply the heat that will bring out the impurities, then God will extend the dog's chain. So live with discernment. Don't let the appearance of the little horn with the big mouth startle you. He is merely playing his part, and his time is short. The King is still on His throne. The end has already been written.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.