

I've met few people like Aaron Smith. "Smitti," as he was affectionately known, was a citizen of Israel, a native of Czechoslovakia who had immigrated and eventually settled on Kibbutz Ma'Agan in 1948. As a young man, Smitti fled for his life from the Nazis. The term "holocaust" was no mere theoretical issue for this descendent of Abraham, for at the hands of Hitler's henchmen, he lost all of his relatives, save two brothers.

I met Smitti in 1980, while in Israel, and became his adopted son during my four month stay. He told me about how he spent a year in a labor camp as a teenage boy, and how he fled to England on a stolen airplane that crashed when it landed. He served in World War II in the Jewish Brigade, and on one occasion was put in charge of a captured Nazi general. Yes, Aaron Smith was quite a man. He died just a couple of years ago.

I want you to know that the issue of anti-Semitism takes on a whole new meaning when you are looking into the eyes of a man who has been hated and hunted solely because of his bloodline.

What is it about the Jewish people that make them so unique? What's so special about the nation of Israel? What's God's plan for the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? We discover the answer to these questions in Daniel 7-12.

This morning, our attention turns to Daniel 8, in a message entitled, "A Vision of a World Against God." I remind you that Daniel 8 is located in the prophetic section of Daniel's book. Chapters 1-6 are historical, while chapters 7-12 reveal God's plan for the future. Keep in mind that the events recorded in Daniel are not arranged in chronological order (the chron. order would be 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 5, 9, 6, 10, 11, 12; Strauss).

Proposition: We're going to seek to answer two questions in our study of Daniel 8:1-14, which will help us understand God's plan for Israel and the world.

I. What did the vision mean to Daniel?

Overview: It was Daniel's second vision (1-2).

1. It deals with the future of the Jews.
2. It deals with the distant future.
- A. Scene #1: Daniel saw a ram (3-4).
 1. It had two horns.
 2. It became great.
- B. Scene #2: Daniel saw a goat (5-8).
 1. It came from the west (5).
 2. It defeated the ram (6-7).
 3. It was followed by four horns (8).
- C. Scene #3: Daniel saw another horn (9-12).
 1. It became powerful (9).
 2. It was profane (10-12).
 - It attacked the people of God.
 - It attacked the worship of God.
- D. Scene #4: Daniel heard two angels (13-14).

II. What should the vision mean to us?

- A. We learn about the depravity of man.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

1. People prosper.
 2. People become proud.
 3. People ignore God.
 4. People attack God's people.
 5. People set up a rival god.
- B. We learn about the dependability of God.
1. There are no surprises with God, so trust Him.
 2. There is no sovereign but God, so honor Him.

I. What did the vision mean to Daniel?

V 1 begins, "In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, a vision appeared unto me, even unto me, Daniel, after that which appeared unto me at the first."

Overview: It was Daniel's second vision (1-2). In the first vision, recorded in chapter seven, Daniel saw four beasts coming up out of the sea, and we learned that those four beasts represented four world kingdoms. In the vision, God was showing Daniel the inevitable outcome of world events. Daniel was severely troubled by his first vision, and the eighty-plus year old man kept the matter to himself for two years.

Then, as 8:1 indicates, God gave the prophet a second vision. As an overview, consider two factors about the second vision.

1. *It deals with the future of the Jews.* The fact is not visible in our English Bible, but the text of Daniel was written originally in two languages: Aramaic (the common language of the nations) and Hebrew (the language of the Jews). The book began in Hebrew, switched to Aramaic in 2:4, and switched back to Hebrew in 8:1. This middle, Aramaic section records those details and events that have to do chiefly with Gentile rule. It traces out the course of the times of the Gentiles (Strauss, 231). The final section, beginning in chapter eight, focuses largely on the Jewish people and their place in God's prophetic plan, which would explain the return to the Hebrew language. True, chapter 8 addresses the times of the Gentiles, but it does so from the perspective of their relationship to Israel.

2. *It deals with the distant future.* Notice some key phrases in the chapter. The angel told Daniel in v 17, "Understand, O son of man; for at the time of the end shall be the vision." And v 19, "Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation; for at the time appointed the end shall be." The NIV of v 26 states, "Seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

Whereas Daniel's first vision covered God's plan for world events from the Babylonian empire until the second coming of the Messiah, the second vision was more narrow in its focus. It dealt with what for Daniel was the distant future.

I must hasten to say that for Daniel the vision was beyond understanding (8:27). Granted, we have more revelation and more historical data than did Daniel which guide us in our interpretation of this prophecy, but a world of caution is still in order.

The further out you venture on a tree limb, the greater the risk. So with the interpretation of Bible prophecy. Where the Scriptures are clear, we can hold on with confidence. But where they are not, we must avoid dogmatism. Frankly, some people are uncomfortable with that kind of tension. They want things black and white. But remember, Daniel himself did not fully understand the implications of what he saw.

He gives the setting for the vision in v 2, "And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai." In vision #2, Daniel saw himself. Where

was he? In the palace in Shushan. Why is that significant? Because Shushan (NIV "Susa") was the capital of Persia, a couple of hundred miles east of where Daniel lived in Babylon. What's really amazing is this. When Daniel saw this vision, the Babylonians had control. There was no Persian palace in Shushan. No wonder Daniel was befuddled! In the vision, God transported Daniel ahead to the capital of the next world empire!

J. Vernon McGee observes (Strauss, 234), "The events foretold in this vision were fulfilled within 200 years. Such fulfillment is so remarkable that the liberal critic insists upon a later dating of Daniel. He maintains that Daniel was written *after* these events had transpired, and so is merely an historical record. It is an attempt to get rid of the miraculous which is embarrassing to his system of interpretation."

Daniel saw four scenes in the vision.

A. Scene #1: Daniel saw a ram (3-4). Vv 3-4 tell us about this ram, "Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns; and the two horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward and northward, and southward, so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand, but he did according to his will, and became great." Two features stand out about this ram.

1. *It had two horns.* One horn was longer and developed later. It's amazing how accurate the details of this vision are. V 20 indicates this ram represents the Medo-Persian empire (which conquered the world twelve years after Daniel had this vision). Like the first horn, Media enjoyed supremacy first, but of the two, Persia became the greater power (Strauss, 235).

2. *It became great.* History verifies what the vision predicted. Cyrus the Persian pushed his kingdom west and north, and his son conquered southward to Egypt. The ram was the national emblem of Persia, and a ram was stamped on Persian coins as well as on the headdress of Persian emperors. For 200 years, Persia expanded its empire with irresistible force until a greater opponent hit the scene.

B. Scene #2: Daniel saw a goat (5-8). Three things stand out about this goat.

1. *It came from the west (5).* V 5 states (NIV), "As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground." The phrase "without touching the ground" is indicative of tremendous speed (picture a speedboat skimming along the surface).

2. *It defeated the ram (6-7).* We read (NIV), "He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage. I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power."

V 21 reveals that this shaggy goat is the king of Greece. The large horn likely refers to Alexander the Great, who, as Daniel 8 predicted, came from the west to conquer the world. Remember, v 5 indicates this goat "touched not the ground," referring to the lightning speed which characterized the conquests of Alexander.

Indeed, what Daniel saw in his vision came true in history. In May 334 B.C., Alexander's forces met and defeated the Persians at the Granicus River in Asia Minor. Three years later, the Greeks overthrew the Persians near Nineveh (Oct 331 B.C.).

Ironically, however, this powerful goat in Daniel's vision didn't last long. V 8 informs us (LB), "The victor became both proud and powerful, but suddenly, at the height of his power, his horn was broken; and in its place grew four good-sized horns pointing in four directions."

History verifies the untimely death of Alexander the Great. At the height of his power, at the age of 33, Alexander the Great died, due partly to exertion, his dissipated life, and a raging fever (Walvoord, 184). After conquering more of the world than any previous ruler, he was not able to conquer himself.

Isn't that a picture of many in our day? Perhaps it's true of you. Oh, on the outside you're on top of the world, but on the inside, you can't even control yourself. You're a big success on the job, and your home is a showcase of your prowess, but you know the truth. You feel miserable. The bottle and the pills help for awhile, but in the silence of the night, your conscience shouts to you. And you don't know what to do. Look to Christ!

3. *It was followed by four horns (8).* In v 8, after the large horn was broken, four prominent horns grew in its place. As we'll see next week, history verifies that following the death of Alexander, his empire was divided into four parts and ruled by four of his generals: Cassander ruled Macedonian and Greece; Lysimachus took control of Thrace, and Asia Minor; Seleucus took Syria and Babylon; and Ptolemy ruled Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia. Just like Daniel predicted 2 centuries prior, Alexander's empire was divided into four divisions, not three or five. You can trust your Bible!

C. Scene #3: Daniel saw another horn (9-12). V 9 indicates that out of one of the four prominent horns there arose another horn. Daniel observed two things about it.

1. *It became powerful (9).* "Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land [reference to Israel] (NIV, 9)." Who is represented by this "little horn" in v 9? We know that he arises out of one of the four divisions of Alexander's empire. But which one?

In 175 B.C. there arose from the Seleucid dynasty in Syria a vicious ruler by the name of Antiochus the Manifest One (Antiochus Epiphanes). He ruled from his home-base in Antioch for eleven years. Something else stands out about this little horn.

2. *It was profane (10-12).* Antiochus Epiphanes was a madman. He was an avowed foe of Yahweh and the Jewish people. He destroyed sacred Jewish writings, disallowed the Jews to practice circumcision, mocked the Levitical offerings, and worst of all, actually desecrated the temple by offering a pig on the temple altar in Jerusalem. He was known as "Epiphanes the Madman," who at one time killed 100,000 Jews (Strauss).

Many years before Antiochus, Daniel foretold two profane acts of the little horn.

•It attacked the people of God. Listen to the symbolic language of v 10 (NIV), "It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth, and trampled on them." Who are the stars the little horn threw down? The best explanation is that the stars signify God's chosen people.

We use the term "star" the same way. What's the term society uses to describe celebrities? We call them "stars." In the Bible, the saints are God's stars (see Gen 15:5; Dan 12:3). But not everyone applauds God's stars. Pharaoh hated God's stars. So did Haman, and Hitler, and Stalin. Just like Antiochus did. And just like the Anti-Christ will.

In fact, some feel that the little horn in Daniel 8 is a type or foreshadowing of Antichrist. Martin Luther commented, "This chapter in Daniel refers to both Antiochus and Antichrist." Jerome said that the Jews of his time believed this prophecy would have a further fulfillment in a future king. Even Jesus referred to "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Matt 24:15), not as a past event, but as that which would come in the future. What else did Daniel see this little horn do?

•It attacked the worship of God. Verses 11-12 describe a dismal scene (LB), "He even challenged the Commander of the army of heaven by canceling the daily sacrifices offered to Him, and by defiling His temple. But the army of heaven was restrained from destroying him for this transgression. As a result, truth and righteousness perished, and evil triumphed and prospered."

In December 168 B.C., Antiochus seized and massacred Jerusalem, and then converted the sanctuary of Yahweh into a temple to the Greek god Zeus. In his blasphemy, the little horn attacked the people of God and the worship of God.

For how long did his acts of profanity last? We find out in scene 4.

D. Scene #4: Daniel heard two angels (13-14). Notice v 13 (NIV), "Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, 'How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled--the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?' The question in v 13 is--how long will this take?"

John Walvoord remarks (188), "The answer given in verse 14 has touched off almost endless exegetical controversy." Here's the riddle-like answer Daniel heard (14), "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated." The Seventh Day Adventists understood that the 2,300 days referred to years, and according to their day-year theory, Christ's second coming would occur in 1844.

A more feasible interpretation is to view the 2,300 days as actual days, and to see that time span as the length of time during which the temple was desecrated by Antiochus' army. The little horn polluted the sanctuary from 171 B.C. to 165 B.C., when on December 25 of that year, the priest Judas Maccabeus, rededicated the temple to the worship of God. This event has been celebrated by the Jews annually ever since in a holiday known as Hanukkah.

Perhaps you're wondering, "I don't get it. Sure, this is fascinating, but why would God preserve a 2,500 year old vision for us, especially since it was fulfilled centuries ago?"

II. What should the vision mean to us?

The vision in Daniel 8 serves at least two relevant purposes for us.

A. We learn about the depravity of man. The truth is, people haven't changed. Oh, the names change, but depraved people remain the same. In Daniel's vision, he saw power-hungry men like Cyrus, and Alexander, and Antiochus. In our day, we see another set of world leaders jockeying for position. We, too, see a world against God.

We can learn about ourselves as we consider Daniel's vision. What's true of national leaders is often true of us, too. We don't have to repeat the mistakes of previous, now extinct civilizations. What causes a society to go down hill? It happens, according to the

model in Daniel 8, when people move through the following five expressions of depravity.

1. *People prosper.* Cyrus prospered. Alexander prospered. Antiochus prospered. But listen. They are not prospering anymore. Do you know what their prosperity resulted in? Expression #2--Pride.

2. *People become proud.* Isn't it amazing that though we live in the most prosperous country in the history of the world, the #1 issue affecting election results in our day is not morality (what is right), but economics. We believe we deserve the standard of living we have enjoyed, and demand even better.

When we fail to recognize the source of prosperity, the result is pride. How is it that a man who swings a wooden stick and hits a white ball 3 out of 10 times isn't satisfied with \$1 million a year, but demands \$3 million? And how can it be that a person will consider it a "promotion" to take a job that will result in more money, but rob from time with God and family? The truth is, depraved people are never satisfied. Expression #3...

3. *People ignore God.* Or to put it in philosophical terms, materialism leads to individualism, and individualism results in relativism. Daniel's prediction of what the little horn would do certainly describes our society, doesn't it? He said (12) that truth was cast down to the ground (we might say "dragged in the mud"; Baldwin, 158).

We live in a society today that basically ignores God. Oh, we say we believe in Him (a 1986 Gallup Poll revealed that 32% of Americans classify themselves as "born again" or evangelical; 71% report church membership; 42% of us attend church in the typical week). Yes, we *believe* in Him, but the truth is we *ignore* Him.

The typical U.S. family spends 23% of its after-tax income to repay debts, while the same families give mere leftovers (if that) to God and God's work. We ignore the God in Whom we claim to believe. We ignore Him. We ignore His absolute standards. We operate by the attitude "if it works" rather than "if it's right." Two people make a lifetime commitment to God, but when they find out the other person doesn't make them happy any longer, they ignore their commitment to God and bail out.

4. *People attack God's people.* Think about the example of Antiochus Epiphanes again. For him, materialism, relativism, and anti-Semitism all went together. Have you noticed how the world is becoming increasingly intolerant of God's people? Who is it that more and more is taking it on the chin in the political maneuvering? Who are the ones who are labeled as "right winged, fanatical, bigots"? The people of God, those who take God and God's Word seriously. It's inevitable that a society that ignores Jesus Christ will soon begin to attack those who give their allegiance to Him.

5. *People set up a rival god.* Antiochus wasn't irreligioushe had his Zeus. You see, even depraved people still have a God-created, spiritual dimension to their lives. Those who reject the God of the Bible soon turn to a "god" they find palatable. They begin to pursue the God they want instead of the God who is.

Is there hope for depraved men and women? Yes there is. We see it too in Daniel 8.

B. We learn about the dependability of God. To say He's dependable means this.

1. *There are no surprises with God, so trust Him.* Do you think God's shocked by what's happening in the Middle East today? He's not. That's why we can trust Him.

2. *There is no sovereign but God, so honor Him.* Jewish Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel has written: "The Jew may love God, or he may fight with God, but he may

not ignore God." This truth applies not only to the Jew, but to you as well. We can love God, or we can fight with God, but we can't ignore God. What have you been doing with the Living God? He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be both Savior and Lord. Have you trusted in Christ, and honored Him as your Lord?

Response: The wicked live as though God does not exist, as though there will be no day of reckoning. We must not. We are the people of God. By His grace, we have trusted in Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. Daniel saw a vision of God's great plan, and was a changed man. We need a renewed vision of the greatness of God. Let's marvel at His greatness as we sing the following.

Hymn of Response: #382 "Be Thou My Vision"

Is the High King of heaven, Jesus Christ, the king of your life? Have you allowed the things of this world to interfere with your "vision" of God? Let's take time to talk with God now. With our heads bowed, consider these questions:

--We've seen the characteristics of depraved people this morning. Have you seen yourself? Would you like to change? The truth is, you can't change yourself. But Christ can. Admit to God right now the truth about yourself: "Lord, I've been too materialistic. I've loved things more than I've loved You. Please forgive me through Christ."

--Have you been taking the Lord seriously in your life? If you haven't, confess that to Him, and resolve that by His help, things will be different from here on.

Time of Response in Prayer

Congregational Prayer

We live in a man-centered culture. One of the reasons we need worship services like this one is so we'll take our eyes off of ourselves, off of our ambitions, off of the world, and put our focus where it belongs. On God. Let's hunger for Him as we sing.

Worship through Singing: #401 "Psalm 42"