

Main Idea: 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. Let's think about what the vision meant for 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. Let's think about what the vision should mean for us.

A. We learn about the depravity of man.

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.

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-12

I've met few people like Aaron Smith. Smitti, as he was affectionately known, was a native of then Czechoslovakia who had immigrated to Israel in 1948 and eventually settled on Kibbutz Ma'Agan. 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 living 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. I corresponded with him until he died back in the early 90s.

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 person who has been hated and hunted solely because of his bloodline.

***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 For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

Anti-semitism is nothing new. Five and a half centuries before Christ, God actually gave the prophet Daniel a vision that revealed, one, that anti-semitism was coming, and two, by whom. It's to this passage that we now turn as we continue our journey through the book of Daniel, a book that helps us know God and how to live for God in a hostile world.

This morning, our attention turns to Daniel 8, in a message entitled, "God's Plan for the World." 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 chronological order would probably be chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 5, 9, 6, 10, 11, 12).²

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. Let's think about what the vision meant for Daniel.

Verse 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."

"In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me."

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 that vision, God was showing Daniel the inevitable outcome in the future of the world.

Daniel was severely troubled by his first vision. But according to 7:28, the eighty-some-year old man of God 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.* You can't see it in your 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). So the book began in Hebrew, switched to Aramaic in 2:4, and then switched back to Hebrew in 8:1.

The middle Aramaic section (chs 2-7) records events that have to do chiefly with Gentile rule. It traces out the course of the times of the Gentiles.³

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. Granted, 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 verse 17, "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."

And verse 19, "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end."⁴

² Observation by Strauss.

³ Strauss, 231

⁴ In the AV, "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."

Verse 26 states, "Seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

So whereas Daniel's first vision covered God's plan for world events from the present Babylonian empire in the sixth century BC 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 what Daniel himself thought of this vision. He says at the conclusion in verse 27, "I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding." Granted, we now have more revelation and historical data than did Daniel. But as we seek to interpret this prophecy a word of caution is still in order.

To put in the form of a lesson my daughter learned long ago, the further out you venture on a tree limb, the greater the risk. So it goes 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 dogmatic conclusions. Some people are uncomfortable with this kind of tension. They want things black and white. But let's remember that Daniel himself did not fully understand the implications of what he saw.

He gives the setting for the vision in verse 2, "In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal."

That's interesting. In this second vision, Daniel saw *himself*. And where was he? The AV says, "at Shushan in the palace". The NIV, "in the citadel of Susa." Why is that significant? Because Shushan or 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. Apparently in this vision, God transported Daniel ahead to the capital of the next world empire.

J. Vernon McGee observes⁵, "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). Verses 3-4 tell us about this ram, "I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. ⁴ I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased 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. Verse 20 makes it clear that this ram represents the Medo-Persian empire, which conquered that part of the world twelve years after Daniel

⁵ In Strauss, 234

had this vision. Like the first horn, Media enjoyed supremacy first, but of the two, Persia became the greater power.⁶

2. *It became great.* History verifies what the vision foretold. 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 two hundred 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, "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, "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."

Verse 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, verse 5 indicates this goat "touched not the ground" (AV), referring to the lightning speed which characterized the conquests of Alexander.

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

Ironically, however, this powerful goat in Daniel's vision didn't last long. According to verse 8, "The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven."⁷

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.⁸ 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. On the outside you're on top of the world. On the job, you're a success. Your family looks impressive. But it's a different story on the inside. And you feel it. You can't shake the reality that something's just not right. What's not right is that you're not right with the One who created you to live for Him and His glory and His good purposes.

And now, because He's so gracious, He's using that emptiness to get your attention, so you will turn to Him, to experience the kind of life where the joy is real, through His Son Jesus Christ.

Something else about this goat stood out to Daniel.

⁶ Strauss, 235

⁷ The *Living Bible* says, "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."

⁸ Walvoord, 184

3. *It was followed by four horns (8).* In verse 8, after the large horn was broken, four prominent horns grew in its place. "In its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven."

As we'll see next time, the Lord willing, 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 two centuries prior, Alexander's empire was divided into four divisions.

Not three or five. And not by a rival conqueror. But four prominent horns grew up to replace the great horn that left the scene at its climax.

My friend, you can trust your Bible. This Book came from God. What it says is true and deserving of your attention and devotion.

C. Scene #3: Daniel saw another horn (9-12). Verse 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).* Notice verse 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 [a reference to Israel]."

Who is represented by this "little horn" in verse 9? We know that he arises out of one of the four divisions of Alexander's empire. But which one?

History helps us. In 175 BC there arose from the Seleucid dynasty in Syria a vicious ruler by the name of Antiochus the Manifest One, that is, Antiochus Epiphanes. He ruled from his home-base in Antioch for eleven years.

We learn something else about this man, this little horn, in the verses that follow.

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 from practicing circumcision, mocked the Levitical offerings, and worst of all, actually desecrated the temple by offering a pig on the temple altar in Jerusalem.

According to one commentator, he was known as "Epiphanes the Madman," who at one time killed 100,000 Jews.⁹ Many years before Antiochus, Daniel learned and recorded two profane acts this little horn would commit.

•It attacked the people of God. Listen to the symbolic language of verse 10, "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 stars seems to signify God's chosen people. We use the term "star" the same way. It'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 more recently Hitler, and Stalin.

Just like Antiochus did. And just like the Anti-Christ will.

⁹ Strauss

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, "It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low. ¹² Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground."¹⁰

So in December 168 BC, Antiochus seized and massacred Jerusalem, and then converted the sanctuary of Yahweh into a temple to the Greek god Zeus. By this blasphemy, the little horn attacked the people of God and the worship of God just like the prophecy said he would.

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 verse 13, "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?'"

Notice, the question in verse 13 is. *How long will this take?* John Walvoord remarks, "The answer given in verse 14 has touched off almost endless exegetical controversy."¹¹

Here's the riddle-like answer Daniel heard, in verse 14, "He said to me, '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.

I think a more feasible interpretation is viewing the 2,300 days as actual days, and to see that time span as the length of time during which the temple would be desecrated by Antiochus and his army. Indeed, 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.

You say, "This is all interesting, but what does this have to do with us? Why would God preserve a 2,500 year old vision for us, especially since it was fulfilled centuries ago?"

II. Let's think about what the vision should mean for us.

¹⁰ *The Living Bible*: "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."

¹¹ Walvoord, p. 188.

Step back from the text for moment, and take a big picture look at it. We learn something from it, something very basic. We learn about *man*, and we learn about *God*.

A. We learn about the depravity of man. The truth is, people haven't changed. Sure, the names change, but the basic condition of people remains the same. In Daniel's vision, he saw power-hungry men like Cyrus, and Alexander, and Antiochus. In modern history, we see another set of world leaders, in fact, a world of people that refuse to seek first His kingdom, but instead that choose to rival it by seeking their own.

I heard a powerful example a few weeks ago as I listened to a fascinating audiobook by Thomas Harding. The author begins with his personal story of attending his great uncle's funeral in 2006, and discovering that his relative was the man who tracked down one of the most notorious war criminals of all time. So he investigated further and wrote the book, *Hanns and Rudolf: The True Story of the German Jew Who Tracked Down and Caught the Kommandant of Auschwitz*.

Hanns Alexander was born in Germany. In fact, his father was a respected physician in Germany in the 1930s. But he was also Jewish, which meant he and his family had to flee for their lives when the national socialist (Nazi) party took control of their country.

Rudolf Höss was also German, a man who loved farming and his family (he had a wife and five children). He also loved his country and was disturbed by the hardships he saw in Germany following WWI (he had been a decorated Iron Cross recipient). So he chose to give his allegiance to the national socialists and Adolph Hitler who promised to make Germany great again.

Hitler needed a scapegoat, so he blamed the Jews for Germany's problems. Rudolf Höss and millions of others embraced the fuhrer's satanic plan.

Höss was offered the honored privilege of becoming the commandant of a new "concentration camp," as it would be called. So he gave up farming and built a death machine in Poland called *Auschwitz*, where he authorized the murder of some 1.1 million people (as many as 6,000 in one day), the majority being Jews.

After the war, Höss went into hiding. But eventually Hanns Alexander tracked him down, and Höss was eventually hung at *Auschwitz*.

You say, "The man was a monster." Yes, indeed. But you might want to redefine monster. Harding describes how Rudolf Höss compartmentalized his life:

When he returned home each night, he played music for the children on his gramophone and recited German folk stories when they were tucked up in bed. From Rudolf and Hedwig's bedroom at the Höss "villa", as it was known at Auschwitz, it was possible to see far into the camp: to the barracks where the prisoners were housed. The family liked to take photographs at the villa. One picture shows the children sitting on a slide at the edge of a small pool, looking happily at the camera. Another shows them playing in a sand pit, while two prisoners walk behind in their striped uniforms. On the other side of the garden wall, the killing intensified.¹²

So monster? Yes. But in some ways just like us. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said it well, "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and

¹² <http://thomasharding.com/hannsandrudolfextract/>

destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"¹³

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 they're 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 number one 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 \$5 million a year, but demands \$10 million? But it's not just the big leaguer. Why am I not satisfied with what God has given me? Why do I complain about my health, or my circumstances, or how people treat me?

The truth is, because of our depravity, 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 in verse 12 that truth was thrown to the ground. We might say "dragged in the mud".¹⁴

We live in a society today that basically ignores God. Oh, according to the polls the majority of Americans still say they believe in Him. But the truth is that belief doesn't seem to make that much of a difference in the way they live their lives.

The typical US family spends a quarter of its after-tax income to repay debts, while the same families, even those who say they believe in God, give mere leftovers (if that) to the Lord for His gospel work.

There are many ways in which we're prone to ignore the God in whom we claim to believe. We ignore His Word. We ignore putting His Word into practice in our lives. We ignore spending daily time with Him. We ignore the Lord's Day and treat it as another Saturday. We ignore the commitments we made to Him, such as "I will follow You wherever You lead me," and "I do, till death do us part."

This is an evidence of our depravity, and even redeemed people battle it.

4. *People attack God's people.* Think about the example of Antiochus Epiphanes again. For him, materialism, relativism, and anti-Semitism all went together.

Look around. We've all noticed how the world is becoming increasingly intolerant of God's people. 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

¹³ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956*

¹⁴ Baldwin, 158

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 irreligious, for he 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.

This is depravity, and we all are affected by it. 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 United States today? How about the Middle East? Is He caught off guard by the anti-semitism, or the hostility towards the followers of Jesus? He of course is not.

The book of Daniel makes that clear. God gave Daniel this vision so His people would know that He knows. And not just knows, but is at work performing a plan in this world to honor Himself by rescuing depraved people.

We'll see the promise of the Messiah in chapter 9. He's coming, says the prophecy. The Savior is coming!

And, of course, we know He has come. The Son of God came to rescue depraved sinners. He became a man, lived a sinless life, then died as substitute for depraved sinners. Then He conquered death, and provided the means by which unworthy sinners can be reconciled to God.

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 us 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? Are you putting your total trust in Christ, and honoring Him as your Lord?

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. 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.

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 express our hunger for Him as we now sing.

Worship through Singing: #401 "Psalm 42"