

# “A Vision of the End Time”

Daniel 8

September 9, 2007

This week, a vision. Again, we have a strange combination of animals and horns, then an interpretation. Unlike last week, the interpretation of this vision is not particularly controversial; in fact, the interpretation by Gabriel involves events that transpire through several hundred years in the future from the time of Daniel’s vision. Daniel’s vision took place roughly 540 BC, and the events would follow through about 150 BC.

## **Daniel 8.**

We are going to use Chapter 8 as more of a backdrop rather than dwell on all the history involved. If you have your bible or the pew bible open, let me just quickly walk through the kingdoms so that you can see how this plays out.

The ram with two horns, as Gabriel says, represents the Medes and the Persians. Think of King Darius, the Mede, who took over Babylon. The vision in Chapter 8 took place during the early part of the reign of Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the Babylonian king in Chapter 5 for whom Daniel read the writing on the wall about the Medes’ conquest of Babylon. That event was seventeen years after he had seen this vision with the ram. Then the second horn represents the Persian King, who was stronger, who would later be described in Isaiah as God’s servant was Cyrus. The Babylonians, Medes, and then Persians were the dominating empires during Daniel’s lifetime.

Then, there is the goat. This part of the dream moves beyond Daniel’s lifetime and into the future. The initial description refers to Alexander the Great, who had vast military success throughout the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (the 300’s), roughly two hundred years after Daniel’s time. The charging goat was a fairly apt description of what happened when Alexander the Great rolled over much of the Persian empire.

After Alexander’s death, both of his sons were murdered. Partitions were made throughout the area Alexander had conquered; there were four different military regions established – the four horns.

Finally, we get to the one that really matters for our purposes this morning. Out of one of the small horns comes another horn – at this point, you get the idea the horns represent leaders. This last horn is nasty.

The last horn represents a guy by the name of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled Palestine the twelve years from 175 – 163 BC, roughly 400 years after Daniel’s time. This guy rates in the hall of fame of villains in the Bible. He was vicious in his rule of Palestine. He was responsible for the assassination of the high priest in Jerusalem. He executed thousands of Jews who resisted his regulations. After suffering an embarrassing and humiliating defeat in Egypt, Antiochus returns and attacks Jerusalem. Some reports

indicate he killed eighty thousand men, women, boys, girls and infants. As horrible as that is – believe it or not – that is not why he is remembered. How sad that a genocidal maniac is not so rare as to be remembered for the murder and hate he committed against others; this guy is remembered because of what he did to the temple.

He raided the temple, removed many of the artifacts that were remaining or had been returned. Antiochus could have had a show on cable about religious real estate: he “flipped” the temple; he erected an altar to Zeus in the temple precincts and made an offering of swine – something forbidden by God. The brazenness with which he attacked the Jewish faith and the temple were overwhelming.

So, why is this important for us? We’ve been doing ancient history and intrigue for several weeks now and some of the novelty may have worn off. I understand, but there is a reason we are doing this: in the interpretation of Daniel’s dream, Gabriel tells him specifically, “This vision is for the time of the end.”

Eschatology, or the study of things of the conclusion of time, is a fascinating and anxiety-producing topic for many people. One reason it is so scary is because the visions of the future tend to be violent and full of imagery we do not understand. When I was growing up, I remember Hal Lindsey’s “The Late Great Planet Earth.” For a kid, seeing something in a book made it true, and I had several fitful nights wondering if this was going to be it. Then, I remember when Gorbachev came to power and everyone wondered about that mark on his forehead. Barcodes and the European Union were all supposed to be signs of the end times.

We worry about the future because we fret about missing the signs and being left out of God’s good graces.

### **The Days and Times are Set by God.**

As we talk about “end times” described in the Bible, there are a couple of things to consider. First, prophecy is not chronologically linear and to scale. Think about it this way: it is like a folded up topographical map of the United States. Imagine yourself standing at the Jersey Shore looking all the way to California. You would see Philadelphia, the Appalachian Mountains, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Ocean all folded together. It is only when you would get an aerial view that you would see the thousands of miles between the Appalachians and the Rockies (not to mention Columbus, Ohio; Indianapolis; St. Louis, and all the other cities on I-70).

There is the temptation to try to out-guess God; that is, that somehow if we read Scripture closely enough, we will be able to find the parallels with the prophecy and then we will be able to predict the where’s and the how’s of God’s prophecy. If we can do that, we can take advantage of the knowledge.

Resist the temptation. Remember the anxiety and tension leading up to the turn of the Millennium? There were people who maxed out their credit cards thinking Jesus' return was imminent and they would not have to pay anything back.

Anyone who says they know when, where, how and who of the future is mistaken and misleading you. God will reveal the future in God's time. Jesus said it this way, "Many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." We are called to serve God, not to make God serve us or for us to gain an advantage on God.

That said, it is important to note that God wanted Daniel to understand pieces of the future time. He wanted Daniel to recognize that he, God, sets the days and the times. That is important to remember: the message here is to "watch." Watch what God is doing. Pay attention. Do not take the here and now for granted.

Watch. Keep your eyes on what God is doing.

This is how the Jews of Daniel's time found themselves in exile. They had forgotten to watch God and had instead taken the here and now for granted. They relied on the economic success of the Temple. They relied on God as their military power, protecting them against all outside threats. The problem was that they had stopped watching God, stopped serving God; they had become tolerant of worship of idols and other gods.

How blind we become when we have plenty and we have peace. How quickly we forget hardship and God's blessing for delivering us from hardship. The fires of October 2003 seem like a lifetime ago.

Jen and I were sitting on our back porch last night thinking about the changes in our lives in just the last year. Things look very different now than they did a year ago (Jim Hagelanz was our preacher at this time last year because we were in the midst of our move from Escondido to Chula Vista.) They look even more different than two years ago. As we look back, we can see the path of the adventure clearly. We can see God's hand blessing, moving, shaping who we are and where we go.

When I look back, I rejoice at seeing God's blessing. Looking forward, all I see are the trials I face. How am I going to get things done? How am I going to get the people of this church to do the things that they need to do in order to grow? I need them to give more, I need them to pray more, I need them to participate more... Do you feel the weight of all that?

In other words, looking back I see God's fingerprints. Looking forward, I can't see past myself.

The hard truth is I have no control over my future. I cannot make you give more. I cannot make you pray more. I cannot make you participate more. What can I do? Pray and watch

what God is going to do. When I do, I marvel because God opens my eyes to see the ways He has provided. I can see the ways that God has transformed lives here.

The days and times are God's days and times. God works within the world we see – in all the good, the bad, and the ugly of the world we see. Watch what God is doing.

### **There is a Spiritual Battle Taking Place**

Even if we do not want to name it or talk about it, Daniel 8 makes clear there is a spiritual battle taking place. The battle is being fought in the earthly realm and the heavenly realm. It is difficult to know which is more controversial or difficult for Christians to understand: the notion of demonic rebellion against the holy kingdom of God, or the earthly manifestation of spiritual warfare taking place across the globe.

Earthly battles have spiritual roots. The atrocities described in spiritual terms in Daniel 8 took place in earthly ways in the second century before Christ.

Antiochus Epiphanies (who gave himself the name Epiphanies, meaning the revelations of God) not only wanted to assimilate conquered peoples into the Greek culture, he wanted to eradicate any vestige of religion and worship the people held. So, over the course of several years, he killed the high priest, thousands of others, put foreign idols into the temple, and then, as the final act, sacrificed a swine to a foreign holy object.

In Daniel's vision he sees all this and is not able to comprehend what is happening. The voice – clearly God's – says, "Gabriel, help this man understand the vision."

Antiochus waged a spiritual battle on God's people, he waged a spiritual battle against God. This is no joke – this was a real battle with real casualties. Look at how Daniel quotes the interpretation regarding Antiochus,

He shall grow strong in power, shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does. He shall destroy the powerful and the people of the holy ones. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand and in his own mind he shall be great. Without warning he shall destroy many and shall even rise up against the Prince of princes.

Antiochus attacked Jerusalem. He killed men, women, children and infants. Even though the imagery in Daniel is that the fourth horn will "trampled" some of the heavenly host and stars; the human manifestation of that spiritual battle were people who shed real blood.

There was no miraculous intervention for those people. There was no earthly rescue. So, was God good? The answer then, as it is now, is "yes. God is good."

Friends, Daniel's vision was not just for his times. It is included in Scripture because the message is as valid today: watch.

There is a spiritual battle taking place right now. The leader of the attack has a name: Osama Bin Laden.

In the name of a different god, Bin Laden has even this week called on people to renounce Yahweh and embrace Allah. Do so, or we will kill you.

This is not a new battle. It has grown in our awareness, but it has been waged for a long, long time. Look at how the battle currently is being fought:

- In Iraq, the targets are civilians and holy places. Muslims who do not fall into line with Al Qaeda are subject to attack in their places of worship. “He shall grow strong in power, shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does. He shall destroy the powerful and the people of the holy ones.”
- We are coming up on the sixth year anniversary of the September 11 attacks. The targets that day were carefully selected; they were designed to break the spirit of the American people by hitting things that Americans worship: money and military power. “By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand and in his own mind he shall be great. Without warning he shall destroy many and shall even rise up against the Prince of princes.

Do you remember in the days after 9/11 how the question was posed over and over again, “How could God let this happen?” Re-phrased, it could be asked, “How can God be good when all these bad things are happening?”

Daniel saw the future, heard the interpretation, and reports, “I was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I arose and went about the king’s business. But I was dismayed by the vision and did not understand it.”

Daniel did not understand and could not explain. Even so, he trusted God. We often do not understand and cannot explain. Even so, we must trust God. Why? Because death does not have the last word. God does. The message of Daniel’s vision was the same as the exhortation after 9/11: God *is* good and God *is* sovereign.

### **God is Sovereign.**

In other words our lives are a part of God’s story. It is not your story, it is not my story, it is God’s story. It always has been God’s story. It always will be God’s story. It was God’s story before we were born; and, if the Lord should tarry, it will continue to be God’s story after we are gone.

The final line of Gabriel’s interpretation of the vision is the key to all of this, “But he [that is, the one rebelling against God] shall be broken, and not by human hands.”

Rebellion against God has no lasting value or power. Oh, it may look powerful for a season, for a time, but it fades. No military, no economy, no power, no product, no technology; none of these things will bring about salvation and victory.

Rebellion against God was defeated on the cross; it was not by human hands. In the cross of Christ we see God's judgment rendered against all that is impure, sinful, and unrighteous. The power of the rebellion was broken. In the resurrection, salvation and victory.

As you look to the future and ponder what will happen, let me exhort you one more time:

- The days and times belong to God;
- There is a spiritual battle that has earthly manifestations; and
- God is sovereign. He has prevailed. The victory, salvation and life are in him.

Accept no substitute.

Amen? Amen.

8:45 prayer/offering

10:00 offering