

Daniel 8

Exegetical Big Idea: God causes the Medo-Persian and Greek empires to rise and fall, even allowing the Greek empire to seemingly oppose him. In the end however, there is a limit, and God's kingdom will be the only one standing.

Fallen Condition Focus: As God's people, it is easy to lose heart when we see such grand schemes of evil and strong forces in the world if we do not recognize that God is sovereign over them all.

Background:

We are again this week in a chapter of Daniel where he relates to us vision and dreams that God gives him. Last week we saw how this type of biblical writing is meant to engage all of our senses as we read it. It's different from narrative, or story, section of Scripture that cause us to zoom in on particular events. This type of writing causes us to zoom out and see things happening in the world from a large, or cosmic, perspective.

The vision that Daniel receives in this chapter is not totally different than the one God gave him in the previous chapter. We see some reoccurring themes. There are some more animals and more horns for example. But we are treated this week with some actual identities of the animals! This chapter is largely divided into two parts: There is the vision itself, and then there is the interpretation of the vision. So we're going to structure things a little differently this morning. Instead of progressing through the chapter verse by verse, I think it's more logical to look at the vision and the interpretation side by side. So we'll understand the details of the vision, and then we'll look at some practical implications for our lives. If you are using a physical paper Bible as we go through this it's going to be an immense help because we'll be navigating back and forth in this chapter.

Intro:

If you stop and think about it, and maybe you do, it's actually quite unbelievable the achievements that humans have made over the period of time that we have existed. Consider the civilizations that existed in Daniel's day, and the level of technology that we have today. We have made amazing advancements in things like medicine and transportation and communication. Electricity was discovered and harnessed and that changed the world. We understand the laws of physics and biology and chemistry. Thirty years ago nobody heard of the internet and today we live-stream this service to anyone who has an internet connection around the world!

There's one area that comes to mind when reading a chapter like this that we have made absolutely zero progress in. For all that we have been able to do and accomplish, we have never been able to see even a second into the future. We have countless history books recording the past, but nothing that allows us to see into the future for even a fraction of a second. For all the "strengths" of humanity, we are completely at the mercy of the future.

Because of this, though we are always moving forward into the future, we have absolutely zero control over it. Reading this chapter really puts into perspective our limitations as humans over history, but in contrast, it highlights God's sovereignty over history. God here reveals to Daniel, and God preserved also for us, what is going to happen in such detail. Let's look at it together and then draw some implications from it.

God can reveal the future not just because he knows it, but because he controls it.

If you remember last chapter, the clock is rewound a bit as Daniel is recounting events that happened during the reign of Belshazzar. You'll recall that Belshazzar was the last ruler of Babylon. He was the one who held the party and mocked the Lord by eating and drinking from the holy utensils of the temple that his successor Nebuchadnezzar took when he invaded and captured Jerusalem. We got a glimpse into Belshazzar's final evening on this earth as he received the writing on the wall that God was going to judge him. That night he died and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom and Babylon became the Medo-Persian Empire for a time. Well before this, in Belshazzar's first year of his reign, we got the vision from last chapter. We are not in the third year of his reign and Daniel begins by writing that he is now getting another vision that was after the first.

This is important because Babylon is still the superpower at this point, and Babylonia is the capitol. Most likely, as Daniel is in the service of Belshazzar, it makes sense that Daniel is in Babylonia. But that's not where Daniel is in his vision. Verse 2 says that Daniel is in the citadel of Susa, and in particular he is standing by a canal that is at the location of city of Susa. Now at this point Susa, which as Daniel says is in the province of Elam, is in Babylonian territory. But this name should sound familiar. The citadel of Susa is where king Xerxes reigns in the book of Esther. The events of Esther take place in the Citadel of Susa. The difference is that at the time of Esther, it's not the Babylonian kingdom anymore, it's the Persian Kingdom. And the capitol of the Persian kingdom is the citadel of Susa.

This is important for the events of the vision. Let's look at them now.

In verses 3-4 Daniel sees a ram standing on the bank of the canal. This ram is charging all around and conquering. Nobody can rescue from his power. This ram has 2 horns, but one is longer than the other.

Thankfully, we have an explanation of this part of the vision in verse 20. We are told that the ram symbolizes the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. It's consistent with history that one horn is longer than the other since we know that this was an unequal alliance. It started out balanced but soon the Persians became stronger than the Medes. By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, a king named Cyrus is on the throne, and he is a Persian. Pretty much by that time it's the Persians calling all the shots and the Medes are enfolded into the Persian Empire.

The Persian empire is like this ram because it expands even further than the Babylonian empire does. This is where we see that no one is able to stand against it. They sweep through and conquer a ton of land.

But that's not the end. Daniel sees another animal in verses 5-8. As Daniel is looking at the first, another animal comes from the West. This time it's a goat with a horn between its eyes. It's racing across the land without even touching the ground. The goat comes up to the ram and he attacks the ram and breaks the horns and tramples the ram. Now no one can rescue from the power of the goat. But in the height of its power, its horn was broken off and four smaller and less powerful horns grow up in its place towards the four winds of heaven. So who is this goat? Verses 21-22 give us that answer. This is Greece. The goat that is racing across the land not even touching the ground is a picture of the extreme speed with which the Greek armies swept over the land, conquering everything in its sight. The horn between the eyes almost certainly represents Alexander the Great. At 22 He inherited his father's army and just

went on a conquering spree. He toppled the Persian Empire and expanded his kingdom down even into Egypt.

Nobody could stand against him. But, just as the horn was broken off at the height of its power, so Alexander the Great died at only 32 most likely by an illness. His kingdom was divided into four smaller kingdom and given to four of his generals. Just as the horn of the goat is broken off and four smaller horns grow in its place, this represents those events in history.

But that's not even the end. Out of one of these little horns comes yet another horn! This one also seems to conquer, but in particular it grows towards the glorious land, meaning Israel. This smaller horn I actually the most horrendous of the horns that came before it because it appears as if this horn is attacking God himself! In verses 10-12 it is casting down stars, it takes away the burnt offering, it overthrows the sanctuary, it becomes as great as the Prince of the Host.

This horn seems to wage war against God himself. Who is this horn? Well most every scholar agrees that this is one of the kings that came from one of the four divisions of Greece after Alexander the Great. This king in particular is likely Antiochus Epiphanes. His name means God manifest. In 175 B.C. he comes to power and makes his way to Israel. He does a number of things there over his reign. He hated Israel. He threw out the high priest at the time and replaced him with one of his own choosing. The Jews revolted and he retaliated by killing thousands of Jews. Antiochus tried to conquer some of Egypt but was not strong enough, so he returned to Israel and took out his anger on the Jews again. He stopped the daily sacrifices, erected a statue of Zeus in the temple, sacrificed a pig on the alter, which was abhorrent to the Jews since pigs were unclean animals), forbade circumcision and made it illegal to possess the Scriptures, which was the Old Testament at that time.

If anyone fits the description of the little horn, it's this guy. He waged war on not just God's people, but God himself.

The precision with which this chapter reveals history is amazing. It's so precise, that many unbelieving scholars just dismiss this portion of Daniel as written after those events and inserted into the book to make it look like a prophecy.

It's one thing to know what is come. That's amazing in and of itself, but that's not just what's going on here. It's not only that God knows what's going to happen, but that he controls what's going to happen!

[Do you have a favorite movie that you've watched over and over again? Each time you watch it you become more and more familiar with what's happening. Each time you watch it you can better remember what's going to happen. You may even be able to quote the lines. That's pretty impressive. But what's going here I the difference between knowing what's going to happen in a movie, and being the one who writes the movie! Not only do you know what's going to happen, you make it happen!]

God is revealing the future to Daniel yes, but he's revealing not only what he knows, but what he has ordained already to happen!

This should give us great confidence as we face history. It's in this confidence that God controls all of history that we'll now look at three implications of the text.

Implication #1**Evil seems unstoppable, until it's stopped.**

We mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that when Daniel receives this vision from the Lord, he sees himself at the Citadel of Susa. Why is this placement important? God did not have to make this vision happen in that setting. Well remember who is in power when Daniel receives this vision, it's Babylon. The capitol of Babylon is not Susa, but Babylonia. We know that when the Medo-Persian empire (represented in this chapter by the ram) Susa becomes the Capitol. I think God makes him see Susa to show him that the imposing capitol of Babylonia will not be the place of importance that it is in the time of Daniel! In other words, Babylon is going to fall.

At the time it seems unbelievable that the power of Babylon would fall! Nobody can stand up against the king of Babylon and his mighty forces...until someone does. Here comes the Medo-Persian empire that takes the kingdom over in a single night. And we're told here in verse that the ram (which is the Medo-Persian Empire) is so great that nobody can stand against it! We get a glimpse of this in the book of Esther. The very existence of the Jews was threatened under that Persian king. Nobody can stand up against the mighty forces of Persia...until someone does. In 333 B.C. a young Alexander the great comes swooping down through the middle east and devours every army standing in its way. We're told in this chapter that the goat (which represents the Greek kingdom) is so swift in its attacks that it doesn't even touch the ground. Nobody can stand against the mighty forces of the Greeks, until someone does.

Now the vision ends with the casting down of the little horn, and we're not told what comes next but we have history books to tell us what happened. In 146 B.C. the Romans conquer the Greek Kingdom.

It's under Roman rule that Jesus is born, dies, and is resurrection and gloried to heaven. It was a Roman ruler who ordered all the babies in Jerusalem to be killed because he heard a king was born. It was the Romans who oversaw the death of Jesus, and under Roman rulers the Church experienced incredible persecution. Nobody could stand up against the mighty forces of Rome...until someone did. Do you see the pattern here? Rome fell in the late 400's A.D.

Evil seems unstoppable, until it's stopped.

[I remember as a kid watching the summer Olympics and seeing Donovan Bailey run track. It was in 1996. I was ten years old. I just remember him running and winning the 100m and the announcer excitedly yelling that Donovan Bailey is the fastest man in the world! In my mind, ever since then, Donovan Bailey has been the fastest man in the word. In actuality he would have been the fastest person in the world. That's an amazing feat. Unbeatable. Until he was beat. Three years later the record was broken. In fact since Donovan Bailey broke the record, it's been broken eight times. Everybody's probably heard of the name Usain Bolt, who currently holds the world record for the 100m dash. He may seem unbeatable, until he's beaten. It might take some time, but somebody will inevitably come along and break that record.]

We should take great encouragement from this reality, that we can look back on history and see that the only kingdom that has always existed from the beginning of time until now and that will continue into eternity, and which is never threatened even for a moment, is God's eternal Kingdom.

Consider that the most powerful push, if you will, against God's kingdom was the day Christ died. God's Messiah, the one he promised would save the world and be king forever over all other kingdoms, is put to death by evil forces. Nobody, it seemed, could stand against the mighty power of Satan and his forces...until God did. Christ rising on that Sunday proved that God's kingdom is the only eternal Kingdom. It proved that God will topple any and every evil force that rises up.

The Church needs to take great hope in the reality that God will rescue his people from every evil deed. But there is also a warning here for those who have not trusted in the rescuing power of God. The warning here is that evil will not prevail, your evil. The Bible is clear that we as humans are bent towards evil and rebellion against God! If you have not sought out God's grace in Christ for the forgiveness of your sin, then your fate is the same as the evil in our passage today. You will be thrown to the ground and be sent to Hell.

I may seem that your evil is unstoppable, but one day it will be. Don't persist in rebellion against God. Turn to him for forgiveness and be welcomed into his eternal Kingdom.

Evil seems unstoppable, until it's stopped.

Implication #2

Satan's opposition to God's people is fierce but limited.

Last chapter we saw opposition to God's people, and we see it again in this chapter by the little horn who seems to be waging war on God and his people.

Satan will use all kinds of means to wage war against God's people. The example in this text is Antiochus Epiphanes. He did three main things in this text.

First in verse 11 he takes away the burnt offering. Now of course we do not practice the sacrifices today, but this was huge for the Jews! The sacrifice was how they maintained a right relationship with God! Of course the reason we do not sacrifice today is because the ultimate sacrifice was already made for us! Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God's wrath was poured out not on us who deserve it, but on Christ who could bear it. Christ's sacrifice to take away our sins is the only means by which we are right with God! Oh how Satan attempts to distract away from the sacrifice of Christ.

The horn then overthrows the temple. We do not have a temple today like they did back then because we know that the temple of God is not a building made with human hands. The Church is God's temple. Oh how Satan wants so badly to overthrow the Church by divided her or causing culture to hate her.

Finally, the horn throws truth to the ground in this same verse. Satan is called the prince of liars for a reason. It's the age old lie that we can be our own god that sends people to hell. Satan wants people to look to themselves for meaning and salvation and identity. But of course the great lie in that is that this is foolish and only leads to emptiness and ultimately rebellion against God. Oh how badly Satan wants to introduce false teaching into churches. No wonder we are told over and over again to hold onto the truth that has been passed down to us.

Satan's opposition to God's people is fierce, but it is also limited. There is hope in verse 14. How long does this evil take place for? 2,300 evenings and mornings. I don't know the exact meaning of that

number, but I do know that it is a finite number. God has determined the number of days for evil, and eventually they will end. Satan will not win against God's people.

[There is a legend, I wonder if you have heard of it. It's called the "man cold". The man cold is like any other cold except it's much much worse. Of course as the name suggest, only men can get it. It often is so debilitating that it causes a man to need to stay in bed and wane and moan about how bad it is for the entire duration of the man cold, if it ever does go away. Legend has it that the man cold brings a man to the brink of death, and his life will often flash before his eyes. It's a horrible condition. Women you should be thankful that you don't have to experience it. But here's the secret, and I might be out of line for sharing this, there is no true danger from it. It's not fatal, and it doesn't last.]

Satan's great lie is that he has control over us and that he is able to snatch us out of God's hands and drag us to hell. But here's the little secret he doesn't want us to know. If you are in Christ, he's not going to win, and his attacks won't last.

Not only is there hope in verse 14, but turn to verse 25. Speaking of the horn we are told that he will rise up against the Prince of princes, but that he shall be broken. And how will he be broken? Not by human hands.

Do you want to know what happened to Antiochus Epiphanes? He failed in one of his military campaigns and he fell ill to a sickness and died. For a man of bloodshed, it's surprising that he did not die in battle or at the hands of a person, but by what we would consider an act of God.

God limits the days of evil.

Satan's opposition to God's people is fierce but limited.

Implication #3

Our weaknesses do not hinder God's plans.

Between the vision and the explanation of the vision there are a few verses that focus Daniel's response to all this. Daniel sees the vision and in verse 15 he is visibly confused! God provides a being standing next to Daniel that looks like a man, we find out that this is an angel named Gabriel. A voice, presumably God's, tells Gabriel to make Daniel understand the vision. Look at Daniel's response. He's terrified! He falls on his face. Gabriel starts to speak to him Daniel can't handle it and he falls on his face as if in deep sleep. Gabriel has to touch him and "make him stand up."

Daniel is completely overwhelmed by the vision. It makes sense! Daniel, a mere mortal, is invited to glimpse God's cosmic plans!

Why does God give this vision to Daniel? Does he do this to ask for Daniel's help? Is Daniel the one to stand up against the ram or the goat or the horns? Of course not. We get the sense from this that Daniel is overwhelmed by all of this because of his weakness and humanity. Daniel's strength does not help God, and his weakness does not hinder his plans.

[Perhaps you've heard of the playoff beard? Men will sometimes grow a beard during the playoffs of a particular sport if their favorite team is playing. The idea is that if men are growing this beard, it brings good luck to the team. I grew a playoff beard in 2007. It was the one and only time I grew a playoff beard for the Senators. It just so happened that in that year the Senators made it to the cup finals. Do

you think there was a connection between my beard and the success of the team? Of course not! Their success had nothing to do with my beard and everything to do with their strength.]

I'm so glad that God's success does not depend on us. In his mercy he invites us in to his work, but it's never dependent on us! Our best strengths do not add to God's success, and our deepest weaknesses do not hinder it.

So does that mean that we should sit back and let God do his thing since we are powerless to change anything? Not at all.

Look at how this passage ends in verse 27. After all of this, Daniel is weak and has to rest for a few days. He still can't understand the vision and he's overwhelmed by it all, but look at what he does. After he recovers, he gets up, and we see that he went about the king's business. Daniel serves in the capacity that God has given him. Daniel rises to do the earthly king's business, while ultimately, he is doing the eternal King's business.

God's ways are above our ways and his plans are beyond understanding. It is not our lot to know fully the mind of God, it's our lot to walk in holiness and obedience to God wherever he has placed us.

God has sovereignly placed us where we are. He might call you to different things, and he might call you to serve where you are, but he's called us all to serve in obedience. Wherever God has called you is exactly where he wants you, and your strengths and weaknesses do not hinder his plans in the slightest.

So tomorrow morning, by the grace of God, rise and go about the eternal King's business, with confidence that God is the Sovereign of history.