

A Ram, a Goat and the Angel Gabriel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 January 2022

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] The reading today is Daniel 8 and it's on page 894. In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision after the one that had already appeared to me.

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. 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. I watched the ram as it charged towards the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it and none could rescue from its power.

It did as it pleased and became great. As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

It came towards the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns.

[1 : 23] The ram was powerless to stand against it. The goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it and none could rescue the ram from its power. The goat became very great but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off and in its place four prominent horns grew up towards the four winds of heaven.

Out of one of them came another horn which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and towards the beautiful land. 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.

It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord. It took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord and his sanctuary was thrown down.

Because of rebellion the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did and truth was thrown to the ground.

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, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people.

[2 : 44] He said to me, it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated. While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man.

And I heard a man's voice from Eli calling, Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision. As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate.

Son of man, he said to me, understand that the vision concerns the time of the end. While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground.

Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. He said, I'm going to tell you about what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Medea and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece and a large horn between its eyes as the first king.

[3 : 49] The four horns that replace the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation, but will not have the same power. In the latter part of their reign, when rebels had become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise.

He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people.

He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the prince of princes.

Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the future, for it concerns the distant future.

Sorry, seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future. I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business.

[5 : 02] I was appalled by the vision. It was beyond understanding. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Emma, thanks so much for reading that so helpfully.

And if you could keep your Bibles open, we're in that chapter, Daniel chapter 8. It'd be great just to be looking at that together. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we look at this portion of the Bible.

It is a difficult chapter of the Bible, but at St. Silas as a church, we're committed to unfolding the whole Bible and not just kind of cherry picking bits that we like and missing out bits we don't, but letting God set the agenda by looking through the Bible chapter by chapter and working through it book by book.

And so we trust that this is God's word. It's helpful to us today. But let's ask for God's help, that he would speak to us by his spirit and help us to make sense of his will in this passage.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your word. We ask that you would give us ears to hear, minds that can understand, and hearts that are open and willing to respond rightly to you.

[6 : 23] In Jesus' name, amen. Well, after we moved to Glasgow in 2016, and after my first 10 months working at St. Silas, we felt as a family that we really needed a good holiday.

And so we booked, well, we had one booked, and we'd had it in the diary for a while, and we had the flight sorted and the accommodation, and it was somewhere sunny, and, you know, even like the hotel parking, sorry, the airport parking was booked and things.

And for over a week, we'd even been packing the suitcases, you know, as things got washed, they were going in the suitcases, anticipating this break. And then just before we were due to go, I got the passports out.

And one of the kids' passports had expired. And we checked the rules, and it meant needing to go and basically beg at the passport office in Glasgow for a quick turnaround of a new passport, with photos of the child countersigned by someone who'd known them at least two years.

And we realized that we didn't know anyone in Scotland who had known our kids more than two years. And at that moment, I found myself thinking, how could God have let this happen to me?

[7 : 44] How could a good God allow this to happen to me? Now, of course, that is an extraordinarily self-centered time to ask that question. And the issues were entirely self-inflicted.

But, and in fact, we did get it sorted, in case you're left wondering about our holiday. We did get to go. But the truth is that many of us find ourselves asking that kind of question at various points in our lives.

How could a good God allow this to happen? And we tend to think that when something happens that breaks our own expectations of what would constitute a good thing to happen, of what will happen in our lives.

We have expectations for our world. Maybe we feel optimistic that in our lifetimes, things will get better in the world. We have expectations for the church. We pray. And maybe we have expectations that the gospel will bear fruit.

Our friends will become Christians. The church will grow. We have expectations for our own lives and how things will pan out for us. And when we find those expectations really smashed, something drives a bus through them, we can be left wondering, is God really there?

[8 : 57] Is he really worth trusting? Because I never expected this. Daniel chapter 8 speaks into something like that. Daniel was one of God's people in the 6th century BC.

They were far from home in the 500s BC. God's people had originally been living around Jerusalem, the promised land. But the emperor of Babylon had swept in as he built the Babylonian empire.

And he took Daniel and his friends off into exile. So they're living in Babylon, far from home, where God is not known. And Daniel is under the dictator Belshazzar, who was a real fool and a mocker of God and wicked.

But the message of Daniel, the book, is despite appearances, the Lord reigns. And starting last week, we find this series of visions and dreams that Daniel was given that prepare Daniel and his friends for the future that they would face.

So we've got three points as we look at the chapter on the sheet there, and then three implications for us today. Our first point is we're going to think about Gabriel and the appalling dream.

[10 : 08] So Daniel has this dream. It's 547 BC. He's transported in his dream out of Babylon to this place, Susa, where there's this great canal. And that's significant because Susa was nothing at the time.

But under the next empire, the Persian Empire, it would become a great city, and they were going to build a citadel there. We find that in Esther chapter 1, that the Persian Empire was being ruled from Susa.

So this is Daniel being taken to a place that's about to become far more significant than anyone would have realized at the time. And we hear the details of the dream.

From verse, up to verse 15, there's the dream. And then from verse 16, Gabriel, the angel, explains to Daniel what the dream means. And this style of writing, we started last week, and we thought about how it's apocalyptic writing.

Apocalypse just means revelation, that God, through this style of writing, we get it in Revelation, the book as well, he pulls back the curtain on things unseen, things about the future or spiritual realities now, so that the people at the time and us today can get these images that give us impressions of what we need to know about the future.

[11 : 22] The images are vivid, they're true, but they're not precise. So we're not meant to chase down every detail and think, oh, well, I wonder what that means, and I wonder what that means, and kind of come up with elaborate theories of how these things were fulfilled.

That's happened in recent history. You know, people get very preoccupied and say, oh, this bit's Donald Trump, and that bit's Ronald Reagan, and that means that this is going to happen in the Ukraine.

But it's not meant to be read like that. This is the writer throwing up vision, throwing up images as if they're on a screen, like impressionist paintings, for us to feel what things might be like, about things that if he explained them in a factual way, we might struggle to grasp.

So Gabriel tells Daniel in verse 26, after the vision, seal it up because it concerns the distant future. And what Daniel is being shown in the 6th century BC are things that came to pass over the next few hundred years, ultimately in the 2nd century BC.

So let's come to our second point, is that in the vision, there's a ram and a shaggy goat, a ram and a shaggy goat. The ram has two horns, if you look at verse 3, one longer than the other, and it charges west and north and south.

[12 : 51] And it's a picture of the next empire that was coming, the Medo-Persian Empire. It swept in, and it brought the Babylonian Empire down. We saw at the end of chapter 5 of Daniel that the emperor Belshazzar himself was slain by the Medo-Persian Empire.

And it was the great Persian Empire that God used to keep his promise to his people, that we'll see in the next couple of chapters, to get them home to Jerusalem.

He promised they would get back, and the Persian Empire let them go. They went back to Jerusalem, they rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem so they could have sacrifices again, and they could enjoy worship of God again and enjoy forgiveness from him.

Now verse 4 of chapter 8 there, as it talks about the ram and how it becomes great, is one verse describing an empire covering nearly 200 years of human history.

And then in verse 5, a shaggy goat literally flies in. It doesn't touch the ground, it's moving so quick. And it knocks over the ram in great rage, and it tramples on the ram.

[13 : 59] I mean, it's a terrifying thing to have seen in his dream. And what it's describing is a terrifying reality. It was Alexander the Great. He was a Greek who became king when he was 20.

And if you're aged over 30, Alexander the Great is a bit crushing to learn about. Alexander the Great, in his 20s, led an army to conquer the Persian Empire, Syria, Egypt, what's now modern-day Turkey that was called Asia Minor.

He became the king of Greece, the overlord of Asia Minor, the pharaoh, and the great king of Persia by the time he was 25. He then led his army a further 11,000 miles.

He got further than he ever even wanted to go. He was in India, and his soldiers just decided they were sick of fighting and wanted to go home. And they conquered the west of India.

It was absolutely extraordinary. And then he died when he was 32, of a fever. And after a lot of unrest, there were four rulers that took over what Alexander the Great had left behind.

[15 : 05] And that's what's being described in verse 8, that at the heart of the goat's power, his large horn is broken off, and four prominent horns grope instead. This is the 6th century, and the Lord telling Daniel what will happen to Alexander the Great.

So for Daniel, at the moment Babylon seems invincible, and then the ram's going to seem invincible, and then the goat's going to seem invincible, and the living God is saying, in the future it will all be gone.

Just as we can go to the British Museum now in London, and it's got rooms dedicated to these different empires. They're just objects in a room now. And maybe in a couple of hundred years' time, there'll be a museum in Urumqi, in China, or Kyoto in Japan, where they'll see exhibits from New York, and San Francisco, and they'll walk through an Edinburgh room, and they'll say, really?

America was a global superpower. There was a castle in Edinburgh. How quaint. They used to build ships in Glasgow. How funny to think of that now, in those places.

And Daniel tells us that the UK, and the EU, and America, these are fleeting, fragile things. But we're also seeing, as well as them being fleeting, and having limited time, that they're brutal, and frightening.

[16 : 30] A ram, we're not to think of, you know, a cute sheep. A ram, a horned ram, can hit an opposing ram, at 20 miles an hour, and if they hit a human, they would die instantly.

And it can't match, the fury of this goat, with a great horn, and its speed. And this picture here, is of, how all across, human history, you have, evil, leaders, who cause carnage, in their greed.

And within generations, they will be nothing. If you've seen the new film, The Edge of War, that's just come out, a couple of weeks ago, it follows these two young men, who were civil servants. One in, it's set in the 1930s, and one is working for Chamberlain, in the UK, and one is in London, and one is working for, for Hitler, in Germany.

And, it's about the meeting, of Chamberlain and Hitler, in Munich. And there's this scene, in the movie, where, the guy, von Hartmann, Paul von Hartmann, who's this civil servant, in Germany, he's at a table, in Munich, with all the leaders, of Nazi Germany, at this table.

And he gets up, to leave, to go and start some work. And as he's walking away, Hitler calls him back. And von Hartmann, stops, and he turns, and he goes back, and there's this line, of all the Nazi celebrities.

[17 : 52] And, it's absolutely terrifying, the tension, as this young man, looks at Hitler, and thinks, which side, of the Fura, am I about to encounter? Horrible, horrible power.

And all that power, was about to throw, Europe, into seven years, of darkness. But by 1947, after the Nuremberg trials, Hitler, Goering, Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, all the Nazi celebrities, they were literally dust.

They'd been burnt, and buried in the ground. Of course, they were terrifying, they were devastating, but in the vast, swathe of human history, in that panorama, of human history, they were fleeting, in their time.

And then it was gone. So we've heard about, Gabriel and the dream, and the ram and the goat, and then thirdly, we meet this master, of intrigue. He arrives in verse 9, as a fifth horn, growing out of the goat, and he stands against, God's people.

He's so furious, with the Jewish people, the Old Testament people of God, the Jewish people, that it's as though, he's at war, with heaven's armies. Do you see that, in verse 10? He says, verse 10, it grew until it reached, the host of the heavens, the army of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry hosts, down to the earth, and trampled on them.

[19 : 15] So we're picturing, kind of God's angel armies, as stars being thrown down. Now how does he do that? It's that he, verse 11, he takes away, the daily sacrifice, in the temple.

So he sets himself up, to be as great, as the commander, of the army of the Lord, and takes away, the daily sacrifice, from the temple, in Jerusalem. And verse 12, he prospers, in everything he does, and truth is thrown down, to the ground.

Now Gabriel, is warning, God's people here, through Daniel, what's coming. He says, in verse 23, that this completely wicked, stern-faced king, who's a master of intrigue, will arise, and he'll become very strong, not by his own power, and he'll cause astounding devastation, and will succeed, in whatever he does.

He will destroy, the mighty men, and the holy people. And the calamity, that's being predicted here, came in the second century BC, and its name was, Antiochus IV.

In 167 BC, he had a disappointing campaign, in Egypt. And on his way home, he took it out, on the Jews, in Judea. Thousands were killed.

[20 : 30] And he brought in, an enforced, paganization program, in Jerusalem, and around it. Carefully designed, to corrupt every aspect, of worship, for God's people.

He abolished, the temple worship, and he rededicated it, to Zeus. And he sacrificed pigs, on the altar, to Zeus. Imagine how awful, that must have been, for Jewish people.

In every town, the Bibles were burnt. If you were found, with a scroll, with the Torah on, it was burnt. And they did monthly checks, in every town, in the region. And if they found, that you'd circumcised a son, you were all killed.

Now what does this show us? It shows us, that the Lord, knows the future. He tells us, the end from the beginning. No one else, can do that. Is it all fulfilled now?

Well clearly, what's being described, in this chapter, was very specifically fulfilled, in the few hundred years, that followed. Culminating in the, mid second century, BC. But I think, what we see here as well, is a pattern, because, history is repetitive.

[21 : 36] And, Daniel 8 shows us, a pattern, of how things will be, until Jesus returns, and God puts things right. Because in chapter 7, last week, we were warned, we were warned, of another horn, that would stand, against the people of God.

But that horn, unlike this one, would come after, the Roman Empire. So another one, was coming. And Jesus warned, the people of that horn, that was coming. In Mark chapter 13, he talked about, the abomination, that causes desolation.

And in 70 AD, the same thing happened. The temple, was desecrated again, by a different leader. And the temple, was destroyed, in 70 AD. History repeats itself.

And in 2 Thessalonians, Paul writes a letter, to the church in Thessalonica, who thought, the day of the Lord, had already come. They'd been deceived. And he tells them, that it hasn't. But he says, don't be deceived.

Before Jesus comes again, the man of lawlessness, will have to come. And he describes him, using these terms, from Daniel. That a man of lawlessness, is going to come, before Jesus returns.

[22 : 37] And he will do, everything he can, to destroy the church. He will set himself up, as the Lord. So Daniel 8, helps us here, not just to see, what happened then, and that God knows the future.

But also to understand, the pattern, of how things will be, in our world, before the day of Christ. If the book, Daniel stopped at chapter 6, in those first six chapters, where we were rocking on, with Daniel, and these great stories, we might think to ourselves, you know, when things look bad, around us, remember Daniel, if we just stay faithful, everything will come good.

You know, we'll get rescued, from lions, we'll get rescued, from fiery furnaces, and emperors, will be converted. Because those things happened, in the first six chapters, of Daniel.

But chapters 7, and 8, show us, that at other times, God's still on the throne, but things will be, very, very bad, for people. people. Especially, his people.

So what do we do, with this chapter, of the Bible? I've got three implications, for us. First is, be prepared. Brace yourself, that life, as a Christian, might be terrible.

[23 : 54] Daniel is appalled, by this dream. But God's people, needed to know, what was coming. So that we don't have, unrealistic expectations. expectations. And when we've got, unrealistic expectations, and what's realistic, happens, we might get destabilized.

We've experienced, something like that, in the pandemic, I think, over the past couple of years. That it's easy, to start asking, when we're thrown, and something unexpected, happens, how could God, allow this to happen?

Especially when, we can't make sense, ourselves, of how it's helped, God's kingdom grow. So, you know, as a church, just thinking, a small example, the week after, we all went into lockdown, in March 2020, was meant to be, our week of events, that we've been building up to.

We printed all the flyers, and we've been inviting people, and it all had to stop. And then we saw, you know, the impact on youth, and children, of having to do things, on Zoom, and them not wanting, to engage with Jesus.

But more, beyond that, we heard reports, from people out, as missionaries, in hard to reach places, like Japan, and Vietnam, and France, who had, lots of plans, and they were meeting, lots of people, and felt like, they had high hopes, for the gospel.

[25 : 12] And the pandemic, just thwarted them all, and everything had to shut down. And you can be left thinking, how could, God have allowed this, to happen? But we're to trust him.

And it's worth thinking, how much worse, would we feel, if something like that happened, but it was, exclusively, to Christians. How would we feel? How would our faith cope, if we experienced, significant persecution, of the church in Scotland?

What if extremists, of some kind, started, targeting churches? What if our building, got bombed? It happens, doesn't it? It happens in Nigeria, and Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

What if, Christian children, were invited, invited by teachers, in Scotland, to stand at the front, so that, the class could be shown them, and they were told, don't trust this person.

They're from a Christian home. Happens in countries, around the world today. What if, pastors, in Scotland, were sent to prison? Do our expectations, of following Jesus, in these times, between his resurrection, and his return, do they have room, for those kind of things, to happen, and us not to, be destabilized?

[26 : 27] As we saw last week, in John chapter 16, Jesus warns his followers, of things that will happen to them, horrible things, that they'll be hated, that they'll be thrown out, of the synagogues, that a time will come, when people will think, that they are doing service to God, by killing Jesus followers, and he says, all this I've told you, so that you will not fall away.

I've told you this, so that when their time comes, you will remember, that I warned you about them. That's the message, of Daniel chapter 8. So let's be prepared, for life to be hard.

Secondly though, second implication, stay busy, stay engaged, stay busy. So look at Daniel's response, in verse 27. I, Daniel, was worn out, I lay exhausted, for several days, then I got up, and went about, the king's business.

Daniel's model, of faithful engagement, with the world, continues, even though, he's been given, this terrible vision. Everything we saw of him, in chapter 1, that he's in the world, but he's not of the world.

As we're called to be, deliciously distinctive, the salt of the earth. When we see, persecution coming, the temptation grows, just to batten down the hatches, and create a kind of, Christian subculture, and have nothing to do, with the non-Christian world.

[27 : 50] But Daniel is this, great model for us. He never compromises, he's always faithful, but he never retreats, from the world. He gets up, and he gets on, serving the king.

What a great model, for us, when Jesus' evangelistic strategy, for the world, to win the world, is that we as people, would stay faithful, and stay busy. So be prepared, stay busy.

And thirdly, don't give up hope. Whatever difficulty, we find ourselves in, it's consolation to know, God knows it's going to happen, God permits it to happen, and crucially, God vindicates his people, in the end.

So we see that, at the heart of this chapter, if you just look at verse 13, right in the middle. In the middle of Daniel's dream, in verse 13, two angels speak to one another, and one says, how long?

How long will it take, for the vision to be fulfilled? The vision concerning, the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary, and the trampling underfoot, of the Lord's people.

[28 : 56] He said to me, it will take, 2,300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary, will be reconsecrated. So the Lord tells his people, that there is a specific, time limit, set by God.

And when that time is over, the temple will be restored. In fact, it happened, and this is what, the Jewish celebration, Hanukkah, is about.

That they celebrate every year. That three years after the temple, was desecrated, by Antiochus IV, Judah the hammer and his brothers, led a successful rebellion, and they managed to get the temple, restored, to serve Yahweh again.

And all through this section of Daniel, we see these, specific times being set, for evil, and chaos. Like we thought last week, if you were here, remember we talked about the, octopus, theme park ride, spinning around, and it's chaos, and it's flying up and down, with its legs, and there's children on the end of it, screaming, and as you approach the theme park ride, it's chaos.

But there's a guy in the cab, at the front of the queue, with one button to start it, and one button to stop it. And as soon as he presses stop, the whole thing just dies down.

[30 : 14] And God says to us in Daniel, global geopolitical power, will look chaotic, and it will be dangerous. But one day, a day known to him, he'll press the stop button, and it's time, will be gone.

It's true for Vladimir Putin today, with his soldiers massed, at the borders of the Ukraine. His days are numbered. His time is in God's hands. And the promise for Daniel was, that the temple would be restored.

But that temple, and its restoration, are just a picture, of what God would do, six centuries later, in the Lord Jesus coming. He is the one who came, not just to re-consecrate the temple, but to be the temple, the true temple.

Because in him, God truly made his dwelling, among us. He is Emmanuel, God with us. And when they destroyed, the temple of his body, he raised it, in three days, as he promised.

He died a sin-bearing death, and defeated the grave, by rising, so that he can say to us, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I've overcome the world.

[31 : 26] And while every other power, and empire, is going to end up one day, in a museum. He is the one leader, who when you join his kingdom, you know it will endure, forever and ever.

In the future, forever, our world will not be ruled, by a goat, and it will not be ruled, by a ram, it will be ruled, by the lamb. In Revelation chapter 5, the multitude, stand around his throne, and they praise him, the lamb who was slain, now standing.

And in Revelation 5, as John sees that picture, he says, the lamb had seven horns, and the song they sing to him, is that he is worthy, because by his blood, he has purchased, for God, people from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation, to come and be part, of his forever kingdom.

He's made them, to be a kingdom of priests, to serve our God, and they'll reign, on the earth. And when the writer, of hymns, Isaac Watts, wrote a hymn, about that future kingdom, with Jesus, he said this, blessings abound, wherever he reigns, the prisoners leap, to lose their chains, and weary find, eternal rest, and all who suffer want, are blessed.

So let's pray together. Father God, ancient of days, we praise you, that you are the God, of history, the one who can reveal, the future.

[32 : 51] It is sobering, for us to reflect, on these prophecies, and to hear Jesus warnings, that in this world, we will have trouble, as we see evil, and tyrants.

We don't know why, it has to be this way, heavenly father, and we ask, how long, oh Lord? But we thank you, that thanks to your death, to the death, and resurrection, of your son, the Lord Jesus, the future outcome, is now certain.

that you have overcome, the world. So help us, we pray, even though we are appalled, by these warnings, of how things might be. Help us to be prepared, to stay busy, engaged with the world, and never to give up hope.

We ask for Jesus name's sake. Amen. Now may the God of peace, who through the blood, of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good, for doing his will, and may he work in us, what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, forever and ever.

Amen.