

Daniel 8 - Does God Know Who Will Win the Super Bowl?

February 3, 2012

Good morning! I am Pastor Kurt. I want to say a special “Hello” to those joining us through the Internet.

Tonight is the big game. It is the Super Bowl! Many of us will spend the afternoon around our televisions with a bag of Doritos and a sandwich, cheering for the Ravens or the 49ers. The Super Bowl is one of the most watched television events of the year. With commercials costing \$4 million dollars for a 30-second spot, a lot rides on the game. This week, *Sports Illustrated* asked this question for its cover story, “Does God care who wins the Super Bowl?” Only 27 percent of Americans said, “Yes.” The majority of those answers were southern Protestants. For the rest of the country, they either think God doesn’t know who will win or doesn’t care about football.

That is a good question. How much control does God have over the outcome of a football game? How much control does God have over our lives? Does God just have the big events under control but he leaves the details up to us? Is God responsible for only the good parts and life’s tragedies are his oversights? What do you think?

This morning, we will discover how much control God has over the outcome of the Super Bowl. Along the way, we will also discover how much control God has over our lives. We find answers to both of these questions in the book of Daniel.

If you are new, we are studying our way through the book of Daniel, and this morning we come to chapter 8. Take out your Bible and turn to that chapter. If you didn't bring a Bible, open a pew Bible to page 745. Take out your notes. Don't forget to use the Small Group Worksheet that goes with the sermon. There is plenty of football trivia in this week's sheet to keep us focused on football. Printed copies of the sheets are found at the Ministry Connections center in the foyer and at the www.christ2Rculture.com website.

Before we jump in to the text, we will take a moment to get everyone up to speed on the background information we need to understand this chapter.

Background

1. **Daniel was an exile in Babylon.** Daniel was taken captive by the Babylonians when he was approximately 16. He was brought to what is modern day Iraq where he lived his life in exile. His constant struggle was how to live faithful to God while in a culture completely opposed to God. He was asking the same questions many Christians ask today in America. Daniel lived around 600 B.C., and God inspired him to write this book. The book was written to encourage his fellow exiles that no matter how hopeless the future looked, God was still large and in charge of the universe. He loved them. He had a good plan for them. Even when the future looked bleak, they didn't need to panic.
2. **Daniel 7-12 is written in the apocalyptic style.** We learned this last week. Apocalyptic literature circulated from 500 B.C.-200 A.D., and it is funky stuff. There is nothing like it today. It is filled with dream scenes, violent battles and

weird monsters. Daniel 7-12 is the largest collection of apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament. The book of Revelation is the largest collection of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament. Daniel and Revelation are connected at the hip. If you want to understand Revelation, you need to begin with these chapters in Daniel. Incidentally, Daniel did not make this stuff up. These are God-given visions.

3. **The point of apocalyptic literature is NOT to amuse us with the fine details about the way the future may unfold.** Apocalyptic literature does deal with the future but that is not the main point. The point of apocalyptic literature is to remind the people of God that no matter what they are facing, God is still in charge. He is still on his throne. He will eventually destroy Satan and evil. It is designed to reassure us that no matter what we find ourselves facing, we have not been forgotten. God has every detail of our lives under control. He loves us. Don't fear.
4. **Daniel 7-12 is not a chronological addition to the book.** As westerners, we love chronological development. The first six chapters of Daniel are the high points of Daniel's life given in chronological order. Daniel 7-12 contain apocalyptic visions given to him during the first six chapters, but they are pulled out and collected at the end of the book. These visions begin with a date reference so we know when they happened at the front of the book.
5. **Daniel 2, 7 and 8 are connected.** Daniel 2 was a dream given to Nebuchadnezzar about the world empires that would follow his own. It was given to him as a vision of a statue composed of four different metals. Daniel

7 was a vision given to Daniel about those same four empires but they were represented by four weird-looking beastly animals. Daniel 8 has more details about two of those empires and how they would oppress the people of God. These chapters all deal with how history unfolded from 600 B.C. to the coming of Christ.

Chapter 8 breaks apart nicely. It gives us the vision, then the explanation of the vision. As we study it, we will look at the vision and tie the explanation of the vision with it as we work our way through. We will look at it under five headings. They are: 1) The context, 2) The ram, 3) The goat, 4) Antiochus Epiphanes, 5) Life lessons.

The context

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I was at the Ulai canal. Daniel 8:1–2 (ESV)

Last week, we saw Daniel's first vision was in the first year of Belshazzar. Belshazzar was the fruitcake that ruled Babylon for 10 years before the Medes and the Persians conquered the city. This next vision was in the third year of Belshazzar's reign. The last vision was a vision that came to Daniel at night while he was in bed. This God-given vision was in the daytime.

In this vision, Daniel was taken, either in his body or in his spirit, to Susa. After the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon, they made Susa the head of their empire. The Ulai canal was next to Susa. It was a man-made canal approximately 900 feet wide next to the capital city. That is the context for his vision.

The ram --- The Medes and the Persians

I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the canal. It had two horns, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great. Daniel 8:3–4 (ESV)

As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. Daniel 8:20 (ESV)

As I did my research, I learned there is some historical connection between rams and Persia. It used the image of a ram or the head of a ram to symbolize itself as it went to war. This ram has two horns. One was higher than the other. The higher horn came up last. This is a perfect picture of the union of the Medes and the Persians. The Medes were the stronger of the two forces, but over time, the Persians became dominant. Together they tried to conquer the world. They pressed themselves westward, northward and southward conquering vast amounts of territory but they never went eastward. If they did, it would put them into India and the orient. They never conquered in that direction, just as this prophecy tells us.

What I find amazing is Daniel was given this vision before it happened. This was a prophecy about what would come to pass in the near future. Some of you won't be impressed with this. You will think Daniel was just reading his newspaper. It was only seven years away when Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. Some of you believe Daniel was just making an educated guess. Let's continue reading.

The goat --- Greeks

As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. Daniel 8:5–8 (ESV)

And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. Daniel 8:21–22 (ESV)

This gives us very specific details about a future king of Greece. It doesn't matter if you are theologically liberal or conservative, everybody agrees over the identity of this king. It is Alexander the Great. As we learned last week, at the age of 20 he assumed leadership of the kingdom of Macedon after his father's murder. By the age of 26 he conquered 1.5 million square miles. He is considered one of the greatest military geniuses in history. For example, in a battle with the Babylonians at the Granicus River, Alexander only had 35,000 foot soldiers. The Babylonians enjoyed an advantage of 100,000 foot soldiers plus 10,000 in their cavalry. The results of the battle were 20,000 dead Babylonians while Alexander lost fewer than 100 troops. He was an amazing military genius. That is the goat that travels so fast across the ground that his feet don't even touch it.

The text then tells us the great horn was broken. This tells us nobody would kill Alexander but God would take him out. At the age of 32, Alexander

was at a drinking party in Babylon. While the details are sketchy, it is believed he came down with a fever after a drinking bout and died as a result of it. As we learned last week, the Ancient of Days can give him anyone a thumbs down from the throne room of heaven, and the most powerful man on the planet will suddenly find his life over with. That is exactly what happened with Alexander the Great.

His kingdom was divided among his four generals. This is what the four horns growing up in place of the original prominent horn represent.

Liberals and conservatives all agree on what this chapter is describing. It was an extremely clear prophecy about the way the future would unfold with the nation of Greece. The difference of opinion comes on when this chapter was written. Liberals tell us it was written after it happened around 100 B.C. and it is reporting history. Conservatives tell us that the Jews in Daniel's day considered Daniel to be written by the prophet Daniel around 600 B.C. This prophecy claims to be written by Daniel around 550 B.C. because it begins by giving us the date the prophecy was given during Belshazzar's reign. Here is the issue. If it is simply reporting history, there is nothing amazing about it plus the first two verses in this chapter are giving completely wrong information. You can't trust your Bible. The other option is that God knows the future. He can tell his prophets the way things will unfold in the future because he ordains them, even events 200 years in the future with Alexander the Great!

Does God know who is going to win the Super Bowl this afternoon? Yes. He even ordains who will play in the 2014 Super Bowl and who will win.

Now the text moves in a direction we might not expect. It moves from the big sweep of history to look at one small slice of history, a man named Antiochus Epiphanes.

A little horn --- Antiochus Epiphanes

Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, "For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state." Daniel 8:9–14 (ESV)

And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great—but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand. Daniel 8:23–25 (ESV)

If you were around last week, you will remember the fourth beast of Daniel's first vision. That fourth beast represented the Roman empire. It might also represent a revived Roman Empire in the future. The beast had ten horns. Three of those horns were uprooted by an 11th little horn that grew up among them. This little horn was known for its incredible persecution of the people of God. We learned the little horn in Daniel 7 is also known as the antichrist. He will arise in the future. We also learned that according to 1 John 2:18, there is more than one great final antichrist that will come across the pages of history.

...as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18 (ESV)

There will be multiple antichrists that will strut across the pages of history that will be weaker versions of the one, great, final antichrist that will appear at the end of history. This little horn in Daniel 8 is one of the weaker antichrists that appears in the pages of history but is not the great, final antichrist of history.

Liberal and conservative scholars are in complete agreement on who this is. This is a man named Antiochus IV, also commonly known as Antiochus Epiphanes. One of Alexander the Great's four generals was named Seleucis. He created the Seleucid dynasty in Syria. Antiochus arose out of that dynasty. While his older brother was the rightful heir to the throne, through bribery and flattery, he stole the right to rule. After gaining his kingship, he marched his army south and conquered Egypt. Then he marched east to conquer Persia and Armenia. Next, he moved south to conquer Palestine. This is what is called *the beautiful land* in the text. Antiochus turned into one of the greatest persecutors of God's people ever to walk the planet.

He began by replacing the rightful high priest, Onas III, with a high priest friendly to the Greeks in order to push Greek culture upon the Jews. His name was Jason. He then replaced Jason with another high priest, named Menelaus, who offered him more money to have the job. As you can guess, the Jews weren't fond of the high priest's job simply going to the highest bidder. They made an effort to reinstate Onas III, the genuine high priest. To put down the rebellion, Antiochus attacked Jerusalem, killing more than 40,000 men in just three days. He entered the temple, stole the temple furniture, sacrificed pigs and

later human beings on the temple altar. He entered the holy of holies and placed in it a statue of Zeus. In his second attack on Jerusalem, he killed more than 80,000 Jews, including women, children and infants. He burned all copies of the Scriptures he found. If you were caught with a copy of the Scriptures, you were killed on the spot. If you were caught praying, you were killed on the spot. If you celebrated any Jewish holiday in any form, you were killed with no questions asked. If you circumcised your child, your child was taken from you and strangled to death on a cord in your front yard. Jews were forced to eat all unclean food. Are you getting an idea of his character?

I told you he was called Antiochus Epiphanes. The name Epiphanes is a title he added to his own name. It means God manifest. He claimed to be God in the flesh. He told people they needed to worship him. He minted coins for the people with his own image on them. His picture on the coins made him look like Zeus. The people, who could get away with it, butchered his name in the Greek. Instead of calling him Antiochus Epiphanes, they called him Antiochus Epimenedes, which meant Antiochus the lunatic. Just don't let him catch you saying that, he would kill you.

This text also tells us many details of the atrocities Antiochus committed against the Jews. Let me give you a few details.

1. **He took away the regular burnt offerings.** That is what he did until Judas Maccabaeus and his guerrilla forces were able to successfully rebel, purify the temple and restore regular offerings.

2. **He threw truth to the ground.** Antiochus was a master of deception. He gained most of his power by gaining the trust of others, and when they least expected it, he figuratively, and sometimes literally, slit their throats.
3. **His greatness was not by his own power.** Antiochus had what many consider supernaturally-inspired levels of evil. I think he was demon-possessed because the extent of evil in his life is hard to fathom.
4. **He would be broken without human hand.** While some historical accounts say he died in Persia in extreme pain of a mental disease and other accounts say he died in Babylon, one thing is clear --- no human being put him to death. God struck him dead. The Ancient of Days gave him a thumbs down from the throne room of God, and his days were over.

When we get to Daniel 11, we will see Antiochus Epiphanes described in greater detail. We are told in Daniel 11:36 that Antiochus Epiphanes was just a foretaste of someone who would arise on the world stage at the very end of history that would be even more evil. That is the little horn of Daniel 7. The apostle Paul calls him the man of lawlessness. The Apostle John calls him the antichrist. There are strong indications that Antiochus Epiphanes was just one of many little horns that would show up in the pages of history and would prefigure the one great antichrist of history. We need to remember what we learned from Daniel 7. All it took for God the Father to bring Antiochus Epiphanes, or any other world ruler, to his end is simply a thumbs down from the throne room of God. That is one of the big messages of apocalyptic literature. God has this

world, and our lives, completely under control. No matter how weird or out of control life looks or feels, it isn't.

Life lessons

1. **God is large and in charge of the nations.** This is what we call God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty is our great encouragement. Let me share a definition of God's sovereignty from a friend of mine. I think he did a good job on it.

God created the universe first and foremost for his glory, and he has the right and authority to govern all things just as he pleases to accomplish his perfect ends.

Daniel 8 reminds us God is sovereign over the nations. Nobody comes to power that he has not raised up. Nobody is deposed that he has not taken down. No world ruler arrives on the world stage or leaves the world stage unless he orchestrated it for his glory.

When I talk about the sovereignty of God, I know it puts many of you in a tail spin. Don't go there.

The sovereignty of God is never a threat to the people of God. It is our hope. God loves us. The sovereignty of God is a threat to those who persist in their sin and rebellion.

2. **God is sovereign over the future.** Just as God gave Daniel the specific details of how the future would unfold hundreds of years before it happened, God has our future completely under his control. Yes, God not only knows who will win the Super Bowl but he has ordained who will win the Super Bowl.

This is what sets the Bible apart from every other book. It is one of the ways it proves itself as God's book. Try the Book of Mormon or the Hindu

Vedas. Try the Koran. You won't find details about the future written hundreds of years in advance. You won't find it in other books because God didn't write the other books! Have great confidence that you hold the Word of God. That is why it can talk about the future with stunning accuracy.

3. **God is sovereign over those who do evil.** This is something most people don't want to talk about. What do you do with people who strut across the world stage that are incredibly evil? Did God lose control when Hitler came to power? Did God drop the ball when Antiochus Epiphanes began butchering the Jews? The truth of the matter is that Hitler and Antiochus Epiphanes did nothing that God did not foreordain for his glory. Yet the Bible is clear, God is not the author of sin. He is sovereign over sin and will use it to bring him more glory. How does that work? I don't know. Nobody knows. In my personal Bible study, I was in Isaiah. I read this verse which reminded me how much we won't be able to understand about God. There are some things we just have to accept and live with the tensions we can not understand.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)

While we might not understand what God is doing, we can trust God knows what he is doing. This is hard for us when somebody betrays us or does incredible evil against us. When a father, a spouse, a parent or a co-worker betrays us or stabs us in the back, it hurts! This passage reminds us that God sovereignly works over those who do evil on the world stage for his glory. We may not understand what he is doing but he promises that he loves

us. We can trust him even when we can't see how the future will come together.

A great example of the mysterious way God is sovereign over evil, yet not the author of evil, comes from the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. He was betrayed by his own brothers and sold as a slave to Egypt. Imagine the depth of the evil you need to have in your heart to sell your own flesh and blood into slavery. Imagine Joseph hearing their laughter as he was drug in chains through the dessert. Talk about a deep wound. God is sovereign over it. He used the sin of Joseph's brothers to bring Joseph to Egypt. God orchestrated Joseph's life in Egypt to bring Joseph to the position of second in command over the most powerful nation in the world. God then brought his brothers to his doorstep to beg for food. Talk about a divine reversal! I love what Joseph said to his brothers after they realized how God flipped the table on them.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. Genesis 50:20 (ESV)

The bottom line is that God's sovereignty is a doctrine that is precious to us. It reminds us that an all powerful God holds us in the palms of his hands. He holds the future. He loves us. We can trust him even when we can't figure out why he is taking our lives in a direction we never expected.



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