

When Kingdoms Fall, God Still Stands

Passage: Daniel 8 | **Speaker:** Steve Grothoff | **Date:** July 12, 2026

Summary

Daniel 8 records his vision of a ram (Media-Persia) and a goat (Greece), real, specific empires named plainly by the angel Gabriel, not left for Daniel to guess at. The vision traces forward past Alexander the Great's sudden empire and its four-way split among his generals, landing on Antiochus IV Epiphanes: a Seleucid king who declared himself "God Manifest," desecrated the Jerusalem temple, outlawed circumcision and Sabbath-keeping on penalty of death, and tried to erase Jewish worship entirely. The Jews' response, the Maccabean revolt, a badly outnumbered resistance that actually won and reclaimed the temple, is the real history behind Hanukkah. The sermon's turn: this isn't just ancient history. Christians face real, active hostility in parts of the world today (and increasingly at home), and the same lesson applies: God was not silent during the "silent years" between Malachi and the New Testament, and He is not silent now.

Key takeaways

- **Prophecy this specific was tested, not just believed.** The vision named Media-Persia and Greece outright, no decoding needed. Skeptics argued Daniel must have been written after the fact, until the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947) turned up multiple copies dated to ~200 BC, proving

the text had been in circulation for generations before some of these events even happened.

- ****Antiochus's persecution had a real endgame: erase an identity, not just conquer a land.**** Forced pagan worship, outlawed circumcision and Sabbath, temple desecration: the goal was making Jewish worship disappear, not just political control.

- ****The Maccabean revolt is a real, historical "small vs. large" victory:**** a badly outnumbered resistance under Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus actually won, and got the temple back. Real history, not metaphor.

- ****The "silent period" (no Scripture written) was never a "God's not paying attention" period.**** He was actively preserving His people through it, and the whole chapter is evidence of a plan already laid out in detail.

- **The call forward:** be bold, stay grounded in the text, and don't read modern hostility toward Christian belief as evidence God has stepped back. The pattern in Daniel 8 is the same pattern still playing out.

Transcript

All right, good morning. So here we are again, back to the book of Daniel. We will be in chapter 8. So we have been kind of talking about it in Sunday school a little bit, about standing for when we read the Scripture. I'm not going to require that when we do full chapters like this, but I do think that it's not a terrible idea. I know that it was discussed that you all used to do that. I think it's a great idea. I think it's something that we should be doing.

And again, we're just going to jump in the deep end, and if you guys are willing to stand for a whole chapter, then stand on up. Let's go ahead and read it, and let's get into it. So we are in Daniel chapter 8. The vision of the ram and the goat. Verse 1, In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, a

vision appeared to me, to me, Daniel, after the one that appeared to me the first time. I saw in the vision, and it so happened, while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the providence of Elam.

And I saw in the vision that I was by the river Yulai. Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there standing beside the river was a ram, which had two horns, and the two horns were high. But one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him, nor was there any that could deliver from his hand. But he did according to his will, and became great. And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground.

And the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram. He was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him. And there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand.

Therefore the male goat grew very great. But when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in its place four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a small horn, which grew exceedingly great towards the south, towards the east, and towards the glorious land. And it grew up to the host of heaven. It came down some of, and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars of the ground, and trampled them. And even exalted himself as high as the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down.

Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices, and he was cast down to the ground. He did all this and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, How long will the vision be concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation? The giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot. And he said to me, For 2,300 days, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.

Then it happened when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeing the meaning that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Uli, who called and said, Gabriel, give this man understand the vision. So he came near where I stood, and when he came, I was afraid and fell on my face. But he said to me, Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end. Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground.

But he touched me and stood me upright, and he said, Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation, and at the appointed time, the end shall be. The ram you saw having the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. And for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise of that nation, but none with its power.

And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power. He shall destroy fearfully and shall prosper and thrive. He shall destroy the mighty and also the holy people. Through his cunning, he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule, and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even raise against the prince of princes, but he shall be broken without human means.

And the vision of the evenings and mornings which was told to you are true. Therefore, seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future. Father, thank you for your word. Father, as we get into these prophecy chapters, Father, just help us to truly grasp and understand what it is that you were trying to tell Daniel, but also, Lord, what it is that you are trying to tell us this day and in these times that we live in, Lord. So, Father, thank you for your word.

Thank you for this time. And, Father, just be with us as we go through this. And we ask all these things in your son's name. Amen.

All right. Thank you, guys. All right. Last two weeks, we were in doing patriotic sermons, more historical things. Well, we're not going to get out of history. There's a lot of history in this one, and there's a lot of history that's going to happen in here. This is going to be a little less exegetical than usual, and it's going to be a lot more historical because that's all that's in here is history.

The last time we were in Daniel, we were talking about the dream of the four beasts, which was very reflective, and we talked about how reflective it is of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue, and we talked about how that implies to a lot of things that's spoken of in Revelation, and we were back and forth and everything in our Bibles. So, these two visions told of the future progressions of the kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar's concern from his vision was the fall of Babylon. He was worried about when his kingdom fell and then what these future kingdoms were going to look like.

That was Nebuchadnezzar's vision. Daniel's view of these visions that he had in the last chapter was the progression of the nations that were going to continue to persecute the Jews. We've got the same vision, two different focuses in it. Now, the rest of the book is three more visions that Daniel is going to have, and this week, we are going to be given information about the next two kingdoms that follow Babylon. We've gotten some information about them from Nebuchadnezzar's dream. We've gotten some information about them from Daniel's vision.

This week, as we get into this chapter, we see that Gabriel calls them out by name. He tells us exactly who they are. There's no trying to figure it out or trying to decipher it. He says that the first one is Media Persia, and the second one is the Greek Empire. We also talked when we opened up in Daniel about how it swapped languages. We swapped from Hebrew in the first chapter to Aramaic all the way through up until where we are now. Now we're swapping back into Hebrew in the original language.

The reason for that is the first chapter really pertained to the Jews specifically. The last section here is not going to be for the secular world. This is for the Jewish people, for the people of God. These last

three visions are Daniel's visions that he has that are God explaining to him the future of the Jews. For the next, well, the future of the Jews, and then even further in the future, even our future, the future of God's people. So as we get in, we see verses 1 and 2, we see that we are in the third year of Belshazzar.

So we are somewhere between 551 and 548. We aren't sure exactly how long he reigned, but Daniel's around 70 years old at this point when he has this one, when he has this vision. This is prior to the writing on the wall. Remember that also. So this is the second vision that Daniel had, but the third prophecy pertaining to the eventual collapse of the Babylonians. Daniel's well aware that the end is coming for the Babylonian Empire. This time, though, he's actually told which nations these are. So this puts a little bit better perspective on chapter 5, where during the writing on the wall, he's very blunt with Belshazzar as to what is going, what's about to happen.

He knows. He says, you knew what you were supposed to do, and you didn't do it. And the word, the writing on the wall is essentially saying, your time's up. He knew this because, I mean, at this point, he knows who the Middle Persians are. He knows that it's going to be them that's going to take over. And he knows that that is who is going to conquer the Babylonians. And like we talked about in that chapter, they're surrounded by the Middle Persians right now. And they're under siege by the Middle Persians during the time that Daniel has or that Belshazzar has this vision or sees the writing on the wall.

So Daniel knows that the end is near for the Babylonians, so he's pretty bold in his statement to Belshazzar is, you know, your time's up, man. We see there in verse 1 that he also, this says this time that he has a vision. This isn't a dream. This is a vision. So Daniel is awake. Daniel is not sleeping when he has this vision. It says that he was standing in Susa by the river Uli. So Susa is the name of it, is the more modern name for that town.

Now, Susa was in the easternmost part of the Babylonian Empire. And at some point, it was ruled by the Babylonians. And then at some point, it became under Persian control. We don't know exactly when, if this is during this time, if it's happened yet. But we do know, obviously, Daniel's familiar with this place. He knows what this place is. He's able to call out what this place is. He's probably been there. If he's been on the king's business, like he was for 50 years at this point, he's been there.

He knows this place. He's seen this place. Again, we aren't sure exactly when this fell into Persian control, whether it was before or after or during the time that the siege was happening in Babylon. But then we get this vision. And we're going to skip past that because we're going to kind of cover all that together, it all in one. But we're going to skip to verses 15 through 19. Then it happened that I had a vision and was seeking the meaning. And then suddenly, one, having the appearance of a man, stood before me.

So Daniel has this vision. He's standing there trying to figure it out. And he's like, I just watched this goat and this ram going at it together, beating each other up. What is happening? And then it says that an angel, appearing as a man, showed up to him. And then God calls out from the midst of the river.

And as says, Gabriel, tell this man what this means. Gabriel approaches Daniel. Daniel falls on his face, afraid. And then it says that he was in a deep sleep with my face in the ground.

Now, often, very, very often when angels approach human beings in the Bible, people pass out. They just don't comprehend what it is that's happening. This is most likely what happened to Daniel. Judging by what verse 18 says, Daniel probably fell on his face and then passed out from the sheer magnitude of this situation. And then Gabriel gives Daniel the interpretation. And he calls out the Middle Persians. And he calls out the Greeks. So we can go back and look at some of what we've talked about over the last couple of times that we've been going through Daniel.

And we see that verse 20, he describes the Middle Persian Empire. He says, this is the Middle Persian Empire. Now, verses 4 through 8 describe who that is. Well, 3 through 8. So, there's a ram with two horns. One horn is bigger than the other. We talked about this when we talked about the bear being raised up on one side. One part, it's a duality of nations, but one of them is stronger and mightier than the other. Again, we see that here. This is the Middle Persian Empire that took over in 539, which will be somewhere around 10 years from now when he's having this vision.

And then we see that the second one, the goat with one horn that broke and grew into four horns. We see that that is the four-winged, four-headed leopard. It talks about how it's one entity, but it's four entities. And it talks about how it came from one and goes to four. And we kind of talked about that when we talked about Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was the founder of the Greek Empire. He founded the Greek Empire and started reigning as their king at 20 years old and began expanding that nation and expanding that until he had conquered the entire Middle Persian Empire by age 26.

And he was dead before he even turned 33. So there's the Alexander the Great is the single horn that gets broken and into four horns. So we also talked about how there were four generals that took over his empire. Andrew, if you have that map, if you can pull that up for me. So we see that after this, it took 22 years for them to divide. All the colored parts are the, what is essentially at that point, the Greek Empire. We have, it took 22 years for them to get this division straightened out.

So we have Ptolemy who took over Egypt and Israel, which is the dark green part there. That's Ptolemy. We have Lysamachus who took over Asia Minor, which is more of the, let's see, the orange section like Thrace and right in there. Then we have Cassander who took over the Greek, the Greece and Macedonia. So the pink section there. And then the final one and the one that we're really going to focus on and talk about today was Seleucus, which was Syria, Mesopotamia and extending eastward. So all of the light green area.

So this is the division of the four empires from the one Greek empire. This time, this 20 year period was known as the War of the Deodokai, which is Greek for successors. So the four guys that overtook or that ended up taking over the Greek empire fought, divided it like this. And this had been a big thing. And they still, even after this time, they squabbled about borders and lines and, well, this is mine. No, this is mine. Well, if you look at where the dark green and the light green touches, the little

straight line right there, that is dead center in the middle of Judea, which is where the Jews have gone back to at this point because exile's over.

And so they end up back there in the middle of a power struggle between two nations, two empires that are fighting over the land. So again, this is in 323 BC. So this is when Alexander dies. 20 years later would have been around 300 BC. So this is, this is a good five or 250 years after where Daniel's at right now. So this is years in the future for Daniel, but this prophecy very distinctly, very succinctly, and very accurately describes all of these events. That's, that's, that's why most people are there for a long time.

People, people argued that Daniel wasn't written when it was written. They argued that it was written after all of this happened because it was so accurate in what was announced and prophesied. It was, it was, people were like, there's no way that that's, that that's right. It had to have been written later. Well, we come to find out that there is front, when they found the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, they found a copy of the book of Daniel from roughly 200 BC, which would have been, quote unquote, after this.

But the thing is, is they found multiple copies of it. And they found multiple copies showing that the book of Daniel had been in their canon for hundreds of years. They had copies after copies of it, proving that it was before any of these things actually happened. So here we are. The Greeks, or the Jews, are back in their homeland of Judea. They're between the dark green and the light green. Now we're going to get into the small horn that comes out of the south. So 175 BC, the eighth king of the Seleucid dynasty is a man named Antiochus the fourth.

Now he came into power while there was a lot of disunity still. Not only was there disunity there at the border, but that's a lot of land for him to cover. There was a lot of disunity among his entire empire. There's factions that oppose one another. There's a lot of civil war and infighting just in his section. But he's also fighting outside with the Ptolemaic empire. And we see that he's kind of spread a little thin. But at the same time, he's getting a little upset with the fact that there's not any uniformity or any unity between any of his nation.

So, like any true empire, he endeavored for a highly imperialistic vision. So he decided, you know what, we're going to get rid of all of the individuality and we're going to make everybody the same. We're going to take this and we're going to take all the uniformity and make everything culturally uniform. We're going to not make, nobody's going to have any individuality. And he thought, this is going to bring economic stability and social stability. Well, it did quite the opposite. He was a very Hellenistic pagan and he worshipped Greek gods, specifically Zeus.

He even, we'll find out, claimed to be Zeus himself. This meant that cultures like the Jewish culture had to go. There was no, this doesn't fit into the framework of what I want. Sorry, it's got to go. You're going to do what I want you to do. And it doesn't matter what you've had as tradition. This is what you're doing from here on out. Now, we read there in verse 8, or in chapter 8, in verse 24 and 25, that it says that he will, where is it, that he will make, he will exalt himself in his own heart.

Verse 25. Now, Antiochus IV, he changed his title to, what's actually Antiochus, I'm sorry, I pronounced that wrong, Antiochus Epiphanes. So he changed his name to, my name is now Antiochus God Manifest, or God Incarnate. I am the embodiment of God. He changed his name to that. Again, he even went so far as to claim that he was Zeus Incarnate. I am the embodiment of Zeus. He had the currency in his whole nation changed, and he took all the coins and re-minted them with the inscription, Theos Epiphanes, God Incarnate, God Manifest, with a picture of himself on it.

He exalted himself in his own heart, as it says there. We also find through a lot of secular writing, but also a lot of historians from that day, specifically from a secular historian named Polybius, that the people renamed him Epiphanes, not Epiphanes. And Epiphanes meant the mad one. He didn't like that too much, but Polybius, who was around the same time as him, called him this often in his writings. And he even recorded many stories of eccentric drunken behavior from the leader of the nation, things that included sneaking out of the palace and attending parties of commoners, where he would play his flute.

He would show up at these parties as the ruler of the nation and be like, hey, guys, want to hear a song? Between him being a drunken idiot and obviously a terrible musician, he usually caused everyone to leave. They couldn't tell him to leave because he's the ruler of the land. But most people would just leave and it would just be him in a room, drunk with his flute by himself. Like this man was absolutely nuts. So, again, he's trying to get rid of Jewish culture. This obviously did not go well.

This was not handled well by many of the Jews who pushed back against his policies and his changes. But there were two groups of Jews at this point. You had the Hellenistic Jews. So the Jews that embraced these pagan practices and Greek culture and started getting a lot of pagan mixed with biblical and a lot of weird things. And Jesus actually confronts a lot of that in the New Testament. And then you had the traditionalist Jews. You had the ones that were faithful to the Mosaic law and the old ways.

Obviously, you've got a group of people that claim to be the same people. And they have two very, very differing belief systems at this point. This causes a lot of tension and a lot of fighting amongst the Jewish people. So Antiochus learns of this and he says, yep, best bet is let's just eliminate all the Jews. Let's eliminate all of their culture. Let's just let's figure out a way to just absolutely destroy who they are and what they have. And so he orders the Jews to stop worshiping their God.

And he tells them instead that you're going to worship Zeus. Don't stop doing what you were doing. You're going to do what I'm telling you to do because this is what. What I, as the king, want you to do. 167 BC, so about seven years after he becomes the king, he decides that it's a good idea to show up in Jerusalem. He raids the temple, takes the sacred vessels from the temple for himself, sets up an altar to Zeus in the temple, and then brings in pigs that are running about the temple into the Holy of Holies also.

And then he sacrifices them on the altar. Not a good look for people that, for somebody that is, but what he was doing was he was trying to eliminate, he's trying to break the Jews to the point that they

were just like, you know what, I don't even care anymore. He was trying to break the Jews. This is where it talks there in verse, or in chapter 8, in verse, where it says that he is going to cause. You will long, how long will the vision be?

Verse 13. Concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot. He takes Jewish tradition, he takes all of the Jewish customs, and he throws them back in the face of the Jews. The Jews, obviously, are outraged at the profane actions, the profaning of the temple. So they rebel even more. Antiochus responds by slaughtering a large number of them, decides, you know what, if I can't make you submit to what I want, I'm just going to kill you.

So he kills a large number of them, and then he sells a very large number of them into slavery. And then he goes one step farther, and he outlaws practices that are central to Jewish faith. He tells them that if you do any more circumcisions from here on out, and if you observe your Sabbath, you will be killed. It is punishable by death. The things that the Jewish people held very central to their belief system, to who they were, to the laws that God had given them.

He says, if you do these things, I will kill you. He forced the remainder of the Jews at this point to worship and sacrifice to pagan gods, and he also forces them in a very serious, but also in a very joking manner. He's like, you guys are going to eat pork now. And forces them under the fear of killing them that you're going to eat pork. So this guy's just ruining all Jewish custom. This is the little horn that he's talking about here. This is the one that comes up out and just, and it says in here that he exalts himself as high as the prince of the hosts.

He exalts himself as God. He tells everybody, I am God. So, after this happens, the Jews decide, we've had enough. We're going to revolt. Now, if you guys have ever heard of the Maccabean revolt, this is what we're going to talk about just a little bit here. A Jewish priest named Mattathias and his five sons organized and led a resistance against a giant nation with a huge army. They tell a Jewish guy that's there to make a sacrifice to the pagan gods. They say, don't do it, come with us, and they escape with this Jew and quite a few other faithful Jews, and they escape into the hills.

And they conduct, over the next couple of years, very many successful guerrilla warfare style campaigns against the Seleucid nation. If you guys have ever seen The Patriot, kind of like that, probably, but without guns. But they fought in a way that wasn't, that the military wasn't used to. They fought in a way that they were able to fight very, very many successful campaigns. After Mattathias' death, his son Judas Maccabeus continued to lead the Jews against the military forces of the Syrian Greeks to reclaim Jewish territory. They slowly start gaining ground.

Then, in 164 BC, Antiochus IV dies. Antiochus and his son, Antiochus Iupator, takes over the nation, and he agrees to peace with the Jews, and he gives them back the temple and allows them to practice their customs again. Gives them back the temple, and they spend a lot of time. Ceremonially, and probably very much so physically cleaning out the temple of all things that were profane. And they

begin using the temple again for their customs and their practices. If you didn't know this, that series of events is what is celebrated during Hanukkah.

And I knew that, but I didn't know a whole lot about the revolt, and I found it pretty interesting. I thought that was pretty neat. So what do we do with this? What do we do? That was a Jewish history lesson for you guys for the day. But what do we do with this? What does that mean for us? What do we, as Christians, 2,200 years later, do with that? If you guys didn't know, Christianity is illegal in several countries, including North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, and even parts of China.

Canada, just recently, like in the last couple of weeks, passed a law that essentially opens the doors for people to be able to use multiple passages of the Bible and consider them hate speech. If you haven't heard this, check it out. Canada, C9. It's called the Combating Hate Act. This is real. This is stuff that is happening in the world now. Now, they are actively trying to squelch the truth. They are actively trying to end Christianity. Just any Bible-believing person in general, we have a country now that is filling up with flooding with people that are coming here from countries that are absolutely hostile to Christianity and are not scared to admit that.

They're not scared to say, we're here because we don't like Christians. The prophecy here in Daniel 8 and the story of its fulfillment isn't just a story about the past. These same kind of things are happening to God's people today. People are being persecuted, and it's never changed. This has never changed. It's easy to get discouraged. It's easy to feel hopeless. And it's easy to look around the world these days and think, there's no hope for anything. People are increasingly godless, people are more and more blatantly evil, and people are more and more openly hostile to the name of Jesus, or even just the concept of God in general.

But one thing I want us to take away from this is encouragement. God took care of his people. We read this story. He gave Daniel, here is the next 200 years of history for you, for your people. Here's what's going to happen to your people over the next 200 years. But what I want you to understand is, I still take care of you. I still have you. You are still mine. And we see that throughout this revolt because there's a small, small number of people who take on a very large army.

And guess what? They succeeded. And they got back what was theirs. God took care of his people. He didn't abandon them, and he guided them through those times. Now, this is a time in the Bible, or the time in history, that is known as the silent period because there was no scripture written during this time. But we see from this scripture right here that during that time, God was not silent. God was taking care of his. So, as we get into next week, and as we get into what we're going to cover next week, when we speak, God hears us.

Daniel, we will talk about that next week. When God speaks, or when we speak, God hears us. And he answers. The question is, do we hear him when he answers us? Do we hear what we want to hear, or do we hear what he's telling us? Because I can tell you right now that a lot of the people that went through these things probably thought that God wasn't there with them because there was a lot of stuff that was happening to a lot of these people that they were like, God has abandoned me.

And that could not be farther from the truth, because God was with them through all of it, because God took care of his people. The ones that were slaughtered, the ones that were sold into slavery, the ones that lived and were persecuted, God took care of all of them. The same way that God takes care of each and every one of us. If we call out to God, he will answer. So again, that was a little bit of history, but I just wanted you guys to, I wanted to bring that into an application that's more for today.

So thank you guys. Please keep reading. Please keep praying. And again, our nation is in dire need of bold people for God. Be bold for God. Father, thank you. Thank you for today. Thank you for your word. Father, just be with us each as we go out into the world. Father, we just, we look at the way that the world was for Daniel and the way that the world was for the Jews. And Father, we see a lot of similarities between the world today and the way that the world has been since the beginning.

But Father, through it all, we know that you were in control. We know that you are in control now. Father, help us to find peace in that. Help us to find peace in you. And Father, just be with us as we go out this week. Help us to be bold for you. Help us to share the gospel with people. Because God, the world needs it. The world has always needed it. But I feel like the world needs it now more than ever. So be with us each as we go out.

Be with us each and help us to stay true to your word. And Father, to just have a prayerful and very intentional lifestyle that is built only for glorifying you. And we ask all these things in your son's name. Amen.

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