

**“An Evil Antichrist”**  
**Daniel 8:1-27**  
**April 10, 2016**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Daniel 8 is another example of the kind of literature called “apocalyptic.” This literature usually comes in the form of a dream or vision and describes some impending doom. It makes rich use of metaphors in order to convey a feeling, first of terror at the doom but then of confident joy as God steps in to deliver his people from the threat, usually at the last possible moment when death seems certain. The closest analogy in our experience is the horror movie, except in the case of the apocalyptic literature of the Bible we are not dealing with fictional events.

Daniel’s vision in this chapter features two animals. The first is a ram with two horns, one higher than the other. When the vision is interpreted, we are told that the ram is the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. One horn was higher than the other because one of those kingdoms, that of the Persians, was stronger than the other. Just when the ram reached its peak greatness, another animal comes on the scene. It is a male goat with a horn between its eyes. This goat is the king of Greece we know as Alexander the Great. So rapid was his conquest of areas east of Greece that he moved in Daniel’s vision **“without touching the ground”** (v. 5). The goat meets the ram and charges it with great fury, and the ram that had seemed indestructible just a while before is now destroyed completely. We know from historical records outside the Bible that this happened in 334 B.C., two hundred years after Daniel’s time, when Alexander defeated the Persian army at the Granicus River.

After a short while, this large horn is broken and four smaller horns grow in its place. Again, we know from history that Alexander the Great died of a fever at age 32, after his body had been weakened by abuse and drunkenness. After his death, his four generals divided his kingdom and each took a part. These are the four horns referred to as rising up after the great horn was broken (v. 8). Then the vision narrows more by following one of these four horns and describing a little horn that arises out of one of the four horns. This little horn becomes great and turns its power against God’s people. It is clear that there is a specific king this refers to, a man known historically as Antiochus Epiphanes. He becomes the focus of attention for most of this chapter. He was an evil man who becomes an early picture of a figure that emerges more clearly in the New Testament. John refers to this person as the antichrist (1 John 2:18) and Paul the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3). But John also says that many antichrists have come, and Antiochus Epiphanes is one of those.

One of the differences between the vision of this chapter and that of the previous chapter is the muted response of God to this evil. Where chapter 7 goes to great lengths to describe God's decisive and powerful response to evil, chapter 8 only says that the evil will end, not even explicitly attributing its end to God. In the case of Antiochus Epiphanes, God seems to let evil have its way. He does so in order that its true nature might be exposed to us, that in its unmasking we may learn both to hate it and to fight it successfully.

## I. The Nature of Evil

Antiochus (Daniel's little horn) was truly an evil man. He is revealed in Daniel's vision as one who tramples underfoot the temple, who removes the regular sacrifices prescribed by the Old Testament (v. 13), and who destroys many (v. 25). We learn more of the details of his evil acts from historical accounts. Like so many rulers, Antiochus was power hungry, and he sought to expand his kingdom southward, through Palestine and into Egypt. He quickly conquered Jerusalem and replaced the high priest with a man of his own choosing. After that, he left Jerusalem to attack Egypt, and the Jews heard a rumor of his death (much to their delight). As a consequence, they sacked Antiochus' high priest and installed their own. As it turned out, the rumor was a false one, and when Antiochus returned to Jerusalem to find his priest sacked, he determined to make the Jews pay for their rebellion against him. He went on a killing rampage through the city, killing tens of thousands of Jews. One report said that he murdered forty thousand in the space of three days. He determined to do all he could to desecrate the temple. So he entered the holy of holies, he sacrificed a pig on the altar, and later even made human sacrifices there. He turned the temple into a place of prostitution and placed a statue of Zeus there. He forbade the practice of circumcision, required the eating of unclean meats, and forbade the observance of the Sabbath.

If we are to understand the Bible's portrayal of evil, we must appreciate the fact that the evil of the little horn was different from the evil of our own hearts not in nature but in degree. In other words, every one of us has within us in seed form the capacity for such evil. It is God's gracious hand of restraint upon us that keeps us from monstrous evil. The heart of his evil is described in verse 25. **"By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under this hand, and in his own mind he shall become great."** Deceit and the desire for superiority are common to us all. It is part of our fallen condition to want to find our value in being better than others. I remember talking with someone a while back who was really angry at Christians who looked down on and judged others in order to feel superior. The problem is that this person was doing the same thing, seeing himself as superior to those who wanted to see themselves as superior. But this person didn't see that about himself because he was deceiving himself. Does that sound familiar? Deceit and superiority are present in all of our

hearts. What is different about the little horn is that he is given the power to do whatever he wants, allowing deceit and superiority to grow without restraint. **“His power shall be great”** (v. 24).

This view of evil ought to produce in us the same effect as knowing that there is a large and hungry alligator in the swimming pool, causing us to stay as far away from it as possible. When we give ourselves to evil, we have attached ourselves to something we cannot control, and it will grow until it destroys us. Evil works like the roof cave in that happened at our church in Maryland during its construction. We purchased an existing building with a flat roof that had to be redone. The roofers began by removing the old roof, which contained some insulating material. They piled the old material in the middle of the roof intending on removing it the next day. But a heavy rainfall happened that night, and the insulating material soaked up the water. The extra weight from that water caused a slight sagging in the roof, which allowed for more water to pool there, which caused more sagging and more water until the whole thing caved in. That’s what sin does to us as well.

This week’s issue of *Time* magazine had a cover article on pornography that described just this kind of phenomenon. It described young men who have been addicted to pornography throughout their teen years. When they reach marriageable age, they discover that they have lost their ability and interest in interacting with real women. It is the nature of evil to take us to places we don’t want to go. God allows the little horn to continue down this road of evil in order to show us its true nature.

## **II. The Limits of Evil**

When evil flourishes, as is the case in Daniel 8, God’s people need reassurance that God is still in control. That is also the theme of this entire book. God reassures us again in this passage that he is still in control, even when evil seems to grow unchallenged. The reassurance comes here in verse 14, in response to Daniel’s question of how long the evil would last. **“And he said to me, ‘For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.’”** There is a limit to evil. Its days are numbered. God may allow it to flourish for a time, but even that permission is for his good purposes. When evil has served its purpose, God will end it. I mentioned last week that Martin Luther referred to the devil as “God’s devil,” reflecting this truth that God is sovereign over the devil and over all evil.

Passages like verse 14 of our chapter are often misread today to provide an indication of when Jesus will return. Interpreters who pursue such information will make claims to have discovered the real meaning of these time indicators and will convince some that they know the date of the end of the world. One

scholar counted the number of such claims of knowing the exact time of Christ's return and found over two hundred claims just since 1945. And that was in a book published in 1994. One of those that was in the news a few years ago was the claim by Harold Camping, a radio preacher with a national following. He said that he had solved the Bible's teaching about the return of Jesus and said it would be in September of 1994. Some of his followers did things like run up credit card debt, convinced that they wouldn't have to repay it because of the end of the world. When October came, Camping said that he had slightly miscalculated, but assured people that it would be during that calendar year. After that failed, he said he had mistakenly been using the modern calendar instead of the Jewish calendar. So his new date was the spring of 1995. Amazingly, Camping didn't give up and still had a following. He made another prediction, this one that the rapture would occur on May 21, 2011. On May 22, he said he was flabbergasted that it didn't happen. Then he made another pivot, saying that he had concluded that he wasn't wrong after all about May 21. A "spiritual judgment" had indeed occurred on that date, it was just hidden from everyone on earth. The physical, visible rapture would happen on October 21 of that year.

The purpose of these numbers in apocalyptic literature like Daniel 8 isn't to help us set a date for the return of the Lord. Rather, it is for the purpose of bringing comfort to us. The days of evil are numbered by God. He knows when to end it, and will certainly do so.

### **III. The Response to Evil**

When evil is allowed to flourish, Satan shows his true form. We see that in the actions of this little horn, a type of the antichrist. Satan doesn't waste his time attacking targets of little value to him. He goes for the targets that will bring the most harm to us if he can prevail. There are three targets of this antichrist, Antiochus, that we can see in verse 12-13. They are the sacrifices, truth and the temple.

Satan attacks the sacrifices. The Old Testament sacrifices were pictures of the final sacrifice God would provide for sin in Jesus. This means that the first and most important thing we can do to fight evil is to remember every day that forgiveness and righteousness are found only in Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. It is when we forget this that evil grows in our heart. I think it is not without significance that Antiochus is referred to here as the "*little horn*." There is something inside each of us that shouts at us, "You are little; you don't measure up." It is what we do with that voice that makes the difference between a life that ends in destruction and catastrophe like that of Antiochus and one that ends well. We seek to silence that voice that says we don't measure up either by some kind of self-effort like gaining power over others, a

smug self-righteousness or trying to escape into some addiction, or we seek to silence it through faith in Jesus. We do this by receiving every day what Jesus offers to us in his free forgiveness and righteousness. Satan knows that if he can cut us off from Jesus, evil will have a clear path in our lives. Whatever the evil in your life, no matter how great it might be, the cross of Jesus is powerful enough to overcome the evil.

We also respond to evil by holding on to the truth that Satan seeks to destroy. The truth of God's word has been under perpetual attack since the beginning. The attacks at times are overt, seeking to prevent people access to the Bible. At other times, truth is attacked more subtly. I see it attacked today by the willingness present in some churches to cater to people's desire for entertainment over truth.

Next, we respond to evil by a commitment to the church. Satan sought to destroy the Old Testament temple, and he still seeks to destroy the New Testament temple today. Paul says that we as God's people are that New Testament temple. Satan hates the church and would do anything to destroy it. We have God's promise that he will not be able to do so. Jesus said the gates of hell would not be able to prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus didn't say that the gates of hell will not attempt to destroy the church, but that they would not prevail in the attempt. The attempt has certainly been made and will continue to be made, because Satan knows that the church that holds on to the gospel, that preaches the truth of God's Word and that faithfully observes the sacraments is a force he will not be able to defeat. What does the weatherman say when tornados threaten? "Go to your safe place now." When the tornado of evil is raging, as it is today and probably always has been, it's time to go to our safe place in the church. Even a church with problems is better than being out in the open.

## **CONCLUSION:**

After seeing this vision and having it interpreted to him, Daniel reports that he "**was overcome and lay sick for some days**" (v. 27). It is a sad event when evil flourishes. But notice what he did next. "**Then I rose and went about the king's business.**" What a great response of faith! Daniel trusted God to be able to deal with evil. Daniel wasn't being asked to solve the problem himself, just to trust God and do his job. "John Wesley was riding to a preaching engagement one day when he was stopped by a stranger who asked him what he would do if he knew that Christ was going to return at noon the next day. Wesley reached into his saddlebag, retrieved his diary, read out his engagements for the rest of the day and for the morning of the next day, and said, "That, dear sir, is what I would do." Daniel would agree.