SCRIPTURE INTRO: Daniel has already had two glimpses into the future. In chapter 2 he interprets King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the future. In the dream there was an immense statue, gold, silver, bronze, iron, iron and clay—and it spoke of four successive empires that were to follow one another. And during the time of the fourth empire, the Kingdom of Christ would be set up. That’s exactly what happened in the coming centuries. Four empires. Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. And during the days of Caesar Augustus, Christ was born in Bethlehem and established his kingdom. Ever since, his kingdom has been covering the earth. That was one glimpse into the future.

The second glimpse into the future was Daniel’s dream in chapter 7. He saw the sea with the wind blowing on it. Out of the sea came a lion, and then a bear, and then a leopard, and then a beast that was indescribable with iron teeth and bronze claws. This dream was also about four empires. Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. But wait a minute, the fourth beast doesn’t fit as Rome. It’s an empire unlike any empire in history in power and brutality. In the fourth beast, Daniel was actually able to look long past the Roman Empire to the very end of the world. He saw that there will not only be an empire of tremendous scope and power, from it will arise one particular individual of great evil and cunning who will persecute the people of God more terribly than ever before. But at the court of heaven will put down that individual and the only person who will reign forever is the one like a Son of Man, coming on the clouds, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the saints of God will inherit his kingdom.

Now we come to chapter 8, which is Daniel’s look into the future. This vision took place while the Babylonian Empire still stood. Verse 1 says this vision took place in the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign. This is before handwriting on the wall and the Persian conquest of Babylon. But in this vision, Daniel is transported to the city of Susa, which was to become the capital of the Persian Empire. It’s a premonition of the things to come.

INTRO: I’m the chairman of a committee of our Presbytery that examines men for
ordination. They have to take five written and oral exams. One of them is Bible content.

Sometimes candidates are asked to summarize the theme and content of books of the Bible. That’s hard for some books.

What is the theme of Isaiah? Or 1 Corinthians? Those books cover so many topics they are hard to summarize.

Well, I hope that if any of you are ever asked to summarize the theme of Daniel you will nail it. In spite of appearances, God is in control.

This theme is in every chapter of Daniel. Throughout the stories in the first half of the book, the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions’ den, in spite of appearances, God is in control. All the visions of the second half of the book repeat the theme. In spite of appearances, God is in control.

Allison said to me this week:

I haven’t had a chance to read Daniel 8 yet, what’s it about?

I said: It’s about a ram and a Billy goat fighting each other.

She said: What are you going to preach about that?

I said: I’m going to preach, in spite of appearances, God is in control!

This particular vision also impresses upon us that every other rule and dominion besides God’s is going to fail. Only God’s rule lasts forever. Jesus Christ is on the winning side, so you should take his side in every area of your life no matter what.

Let’s jump right into this chapter and look at it under two big headings. 1. What Daniel saw and heard in the vision 2. What this vision means for us
MP#1 What Daniel saw and heard in the vision
He looked up and he saw a ram. A great big wooly male sheep. It had two horns.
But one grows up later and becomes larger, so the horns were lopsided.
This ram with two horns symbolized the kings of the Medes and Persians.
There can be no doubt about that, because the angel interpreter says so when he
comes to Daniel to explain the vision.
Why were the horns lopsided? Because of what happened in later history.
At first the Medes were dominant, then the Persians gained the upper hand through
Cyrus the Great, a Persian who married the daughter of the King of the Medes and
then killed his father-in-law and took the throne.
The symbol of the Persian Empire was the ram, just like Dodge trucks!
Look what this ram does. It butts, it pushes to the west, the north and the south.
Which is exactly where the Persian Empire expanded, west to Asia Minor,
north to Parthia, and south to Egypt.

Then Daniel sees something else.
Charging from the west, so fast its feet don’t touch the ground is a male goat,
a Billy goat. It has one big horn between its eyes.
There is an enormous collision between the ram in east and the goat from the
west, the ram’s horns are shattered and it’s powerless before the goat.
The angel says this goat is the king of Greece and the horn the first king of Greece.
Once again, this vision describes what happened in later history.
Alexander the Great shattered the Persian armies.
He was always outnumbered, sometimes 3 to 1, he never lost a battle, he inflicted
terrible losses. In the Battle of Issus the Persians lost 30,000, the Greeks 1,200.
The fact that the goat’s feet didn’t touch the ground speaks of the rapidity of his
conquest, which was unprecedented in ancient history.

The goat became very great, but at the height of his power, his large horn was
broken off. That’s exactly what happened.
At age 33, at the height of his power, Alexander died.
The exact cause of his death is still something of a mystery.
But even though the great horn was broken off, the goat did not die.
Four horns grew up in its place toward the four points of the compass.
Which is precisely what happened after Alexander’s death.
His empire was divided between his four generals.
Macedonia was under Cassander. Thrace and Asia Minor were under Antigonus
Egypt was under Ptolemy. Syria was under Seleucus.
Do you have a grasp of the vision so far?
A ram with two horns, one bigger than the other, takes over the world.
Then the ram is knocked down by a Billy goat with one big horn, but that big horn is broken off and four horns take its place. Now watch those four horns, because out of one of them comes a little horn. Out of one of the quarters of the Greek Empire comes another ruler. And this little horn starts to grow and stretch itself to the south and to the east, and toward the Beautiful Land, toward the Promised Land, toward Israel.

There is no doubt at all that this is an individual who is known to us in history as Antiochus Epiphanes. He came to power in one quarter of the Greek Empire and he went south to Egypt, then east into Parthia, then he invaded Judea and Jerusalem. During his reign he tried to destroy Jewish faith and identity.

Here’s what the Jewish historian Josephus wrote about him. There would arise . . . a certain king who would make war on the Jewish nation and their laws, deprive them of the form of government based on these laws, spoil the temple, and prevent the sacrifices from being offered for three years. And these misfortunes our nation did in fact come to experience under Antiochus Epiphanes, just as Daniel many years before saw and wrote that they would happen.” Exactly what Daniel said in the fifth century before Christ came to pass in the second century, 300 years later. Out of remains of the Greek Empire arose this awful persecutor of the people of God.

Look what Daniel foresaw this person would do. Verse 10 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 . . . This does not mean Antiochus fought angels, but in Exodus, the tribes of Israel are called the hosts of the Lord. When believers are hurt, heaven is hurt. That’s why when Paul was on the Damascus Road persecuting Christians, Jesus Christ appeared from heaven and said: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Daniel also foresaw that this ruler would claim to be as great as God, 11 and 25. The little horn set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host, he will take his stand against the Prince of princes. His first name, Antiochus, he inherited from his father. But his second name, Epiphanes, he gave himself. It means God manifest. I’m God. Daniel foresaw that he would take away worship and sacrifices of God’s people. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him (God) and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. Antiochus desecrated the temple in Jerusalem. In the Holy of Holies he placed an object dedicated to Zeus.
On the great altar in the temple courtyard he sacrificed an unclean animal, a pig. Daniel also foresaw that he would throw truth to the ground. Verse 12. Antiochus burned every copy of Scripture he could find and he executed anyone found in possession of and writing of Scripture. His goal was total elimination.

He outlawed keeping the law of Moses, especially circumcision. Infant boys found circumcised were killed, hung around their mother’s necks, their mothers thrown off a high place to their death, then the entire family killed. How could you escape if you were a Jew? Give up your Jewish identity and faith and adopt Greek ways and religion. A great many Jews capitulated out of fear and did that very thing. Vs. 24 He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.

The reign of Antiochus Epiphanes was the greatest threat to the existence the people of God in all history. A great many were killed for practicing their faith. Bigger numbers capitulated and gave up their faith and identity. All public worship stopped. Scripture became scarce. Antiochus was a powerful, crafty psychopath. Step by step he methodically destroyed their beliefs and practices and began to turn them into pagan Greeks. And he seemed unstoppable.

Then Daniel hears an angel asking how long this trampling of God’ people will last. Another angel says to Daniel, For 2,300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated. Evenings and mornings refer to the sacrifices offered daily in the temple. There are a couple different ways this time frame can be applied to the length of the persecution, but what’s important is that it will end. And it did. In December 164 BC Antiochus’ grasp on power suddenly slipped and he was brought down and the temple was reclaimed by God’s people and purified. That purification and rededication became the Feast of Hanukkah which the Jews still celebrate and which Jesus himself celebrated in John 10.

Then the angel says: Preserve this vision and seal it up for the future. Because God knew that in the dark, dark days that were coming, they would need this prophecy. And thank God they had it, otherwise they would have given up. But they believed, 2,300 evenings and mornings and he’ll be gone. So they held on. That’s what Daniel saw and heard, and that’s how it played out in history. Now let’s consider . . .

MP#2 What this vision means for us
In Daniel’s dream in chapter 7, we read about another little horn. Remember? The fourth beast came out of the sea, the strong and terrifying beast. And out of its head grew a little horn with eyes and a mouth that spoke boastful, blasphemous words. This little horn waged war against the saints and defeated them.

We saw that the little horn of chapter 7 is an individual who will come at the end of time that the New Testament calls the Antichrist and the Man of Lawlessness. He will cause the Lord’s people to suffer like they’ve never suffered before in terms of the breadth and extent of his persecution. There will be no place in the world where Christians will be able to go to escape, because this person will have gained the leadership of a world-wide empire of terrifying power.

Maybe you find that hard to believe. It’s hard to imagine there really will be a person like this who not only come to world power, but who will then focus his power on eliminating the Christian faith. It may also be hard to imagine someone with this kind of power being taken down. But Daniel sees a divine figure, one like a Son of Man, coming on the clouds of heaven, and he takes down the beast and the little horn.

That’s the little horn of chapter 7, who will appear at the end of history. In this chapter, there’s this other little horn who has already appeared in history—Antiochus Epiphanes. All that Daniel’s vision revealed about him detail by detail came to pass.

Perhaps when the Jews first read Daniel’s vision, they found it hard to believe that this little horn would appear on the stage of history, but he did. And when he consolidated his power and then began to methodically destroy their faith and identity, they may have found it hard to even imagine a way he could be taken down. But he was.

I’ve already said it, but I’ll say it again because it’s crucial. The man who will appear at the end of the world and Antiochus Epiphanes who appeared in 164 years before Christ are both described as little horns. They are different individuals. One has already come and one is still to come. But the same description is used of both of them, because in a sense, they are one and the same.

In 1 John 2, the Apostle John tells us that the Antichrist will come. He also tells us in that chapter that many antichrists have already come.
And he also tells us in that chapter that the spirit of antichrist is in the world. There will be many little horns. And there will be one little horn at the end of time who will be worse than all of them.

Antiochus Epiphanes was a little horn. Nero was another one. Hitler was one. He hated Christianity and tried to crush the faithful in Germany. Stalin was a little horn. Mao Zedong, Idi Amin, Ayatollah Khomeini. They were all bitter enemies of the church, burners of Bibles, arrogant, determined to crush the truth.

In our own day the Kim Dynasty in North Korea is a little horn. The Kims are deified. Koreans are required to worship them, pray to them. Christians are generationally imprisoned. All churches eliminated. Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, is currently waging a determined effort to eliminate true Christianity in China. He’s the leader of the largest nation on the planet, but to God, he’s a little horn.

Supposedly, after Sputnik was successfully launched, Nikita Khrushchev said: “We will go right up to heaven, if there is a heaven. And right up to the throne of God, if there is a throne of God. And we will topple God off his throne, if there is a God.” But God looked down and said, I’m the one who does the toppling. And overnight one of the world’s most powerful men was deposed and marginalized and ended his days under house arrest. It happened because of a power struggle within the communist party. Anybody looking at it from a secular viewpoint would say it was just politics. But it was the hand of God breaking off yet another little horn.

In Daniel’s vision, the angel tells him that when the little horn feels secure he will be destroyed, but not by human hands. Remember in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2 the great statue is knocked down and crushed by a stone that is not cut by human hands. When Belshazzar was puffed up, the fingers of a man’s hand wrote his doom. No matter how great the tyrant, it just takes the hand of God to sweep him off the stage of history.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 says: And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. Jesus will just blow on the Antichrist and he will be gone.
One thing this vision means for us is that it gives us theology of history,
and a theology of politics.

God laughs at human power.
  To him, the great Persian Empire was just a lopsided ram.
  The Greek Empire and Alexander the Great was just a Billy goat.
And the greatest threat to the existence of his people was just a little horn.
  And they will all be little horns to God, even the Antichrist himself.

That should put things in perspective for you when you get worried.

And there’s something else.

What’s the name of the angel interpreter who comes to Daniel in this vision?
  It’s Gabriel. Fascinating. This is the first time in the Bible an angel is named.

Gabriel appears in Daniel and then he appears again in the New Testament.
  Do you remember where?

Gabriel met Zechariah in the temple and told him that he and Elizabeth would have
  a son who they were to name John. This John, John the Baptist, would prepare
  the way for the Messiah.

Then Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, and told her she will bear the Messiah.
  She related this news to her cousin Elizabeth and Zechariah.

When John the Baptist is born, his father Zechariah bursts forth in spontaneous
  praise and he said:
Blessed be Lord God of Israel for he has raised up for us a horn of salvation
  in the house of his servant David!

God guarantees that no power will prosper except the power of his Son and that
  every display of evil will be put down.

The horn of salvation who the Lord God of Israel has raised up for us in the
  house of David will reign forever!

It’s folly to fight God.
  We can take comfort in the opposite, that if God is for us, who can be against us.

What does this mean for you?

It means, when you go to school, take Christ’s side and don’t be afraid.

When you go to your workplace, take Christ’s side, and fear not.
  When you are with relatives, friends, colleagues, strangers, in whatever
  circumstance or situation or conversation you find yourself in—take Christ’s side.

Because it’s the winning side!