

Reaching for Heaven

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] Father, thank you so much for your word. We do pray again that you would help us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, friends, I need to warn you ahead of time. There's a fair bit of Bible flipping that will happen today. For most of the talk, just use the little outline that I've given you. But later on, we're going to have to pick up one of these Bibles, and I'll give you page numbers, and we'll move through it. We've come for a long journey now through Daniel. And most people stop at chapter 6 or 7, but we're going to go through to the end. So you'll be glad to hear that. Now, we are, though, at the tail end of the book, and in many ways the book is now coming to its climax, particularly in chapter 7 and then on into chapter 12.

Everything has now been put into place for us to understand what is going on here. Now, last week we looked at God's future painted in broad outline. We met the animals of God, and they were painted as voracious beasts coming out of the sea.

We met the Ancient of Days, the judge of all the earth. We met the Son of Man, his appointed ruler, to whom God has given all rule and all authority. We now know that the future is known, that God has it all mapped out.

[1 : 19] But what we're going to do today is look at one specific example of how this works out in history. And we'll see that this is a pattern for all of history. So I want you to come with me into the world of Daniel, chapter 8.

Now, for your interest, I have put an outline of the way that the book of Daniel is structured at the back of your outlines. And sometime you might like to have a look at that and just see how this wonderful book is so intricately structured.

Now, before we start on Daniel 8, I need to say there's so much in this chapter that we are not going to have time to look at all of it, but just mainly give it an overview. So it'll help me if you have your Bibles open or the outline open.

If you want to look at it in the Pew Bibles, it's page 725. However, it might be easier to follow in the outline at this particular point. Now, the first thing I want you to notice is that two years have now passed since the dream of chapter 7, which occurred in the first year of Belshazzar.

We are now in the third year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. Second thing I want you to notice is that Daniel is not dreaming here. He dreamt in chapter 7, but now he's having a vision.

[2 : 29] And actually, no, a dream happens when you're asleep. However, in biblical thought, visions happen when you are awake. Third thing to notice is that the focus has now shifted.

In this vision, Daniel is no longer in Babylon. Verse 2 tells us that he is in the citadel of Susa, in the province of Elam. Now, if you'd like to know where that is, if you turn to the back of the outline, you'll see a little map there.

And I've supplied a little map if you've got good eyesight. And you can see right across on the right-hand side there is Elam and Susa. Now, Daniel is there in Susa.

That kingdom there is the next great force on the world stage. Babylon has just about had its day at this time.

And Daniel's vision concerns the future after Babylon. It concerns a world of politics and the future of Israel after Babylon and after the exile. And it is tied up with Susa and two other nations, which we'll mention in a moment.

[3 : 37] Now look at verse 3. We're introduced to the first of two animals that dominate this chapter. Both are clean animals. Both are a lot less terrifying than the animals that came out of the sea in chapter 7.

Both animals are used in the Old Testament as symbols of power and of leadership. Both appear from almost out of nowhere. Both act aggressively and boldly.

Both enjoy success and then fall. The first one appears in verse 3. It is a ram with two long horns. It is standing beside the canal in Susa.

And Daniel 4 tells us, sorry, verse 4 tells us what he does. As Daniel watched in his dream, the ram charged toward the west and the north and the south.

No animal could stand against it. None could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and it became great. Now, given where the ram is from, we don't really need to work hard to identify it.

[4 : 42] He clearly represents the kings of the Meds and the Persians, hence the two horns. And that's confirmed by the messenger Gabriel in verse 20. Can you see it there? Gabriel says this.

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The two horns indicate that this is a united empire made up of two clearly distinguished nations.

The statement that one of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later refers to the fact that the Persian kingdom, the Persian part of this kingdom, arose later than that of the Medes, but became greater, exceeded it in power.

Now, under its first great king, which the Bible names, King Cyrus, and his successors, this nation extended its boundaries as its charge toward the west, toward the north, and toward the south.

No king could stand against the ram. None could rescue from its power. He did as he pleased, and he became great. None could resist his aggressive power.

[5 : 48] This was one of the great nations of the world. Now look at verse 5. The second creature appears. This time, it is a he-goat.

I like his description later on. A shaggy goat. I don't think he's meant to be cute. I think he's meant to be terrifying. Anyway, now perhaps you've seen the futurist painting by Giacomo Bala called The Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash.

I wonder if you've ever seen it. I'll just give me a little section of it there. I'll put a bit of it in your outlines. It's an attempt to capture the movement of a dog, and the artist has shown the legs of a dog in a variety of different positions, as the leader's in a variety of different positions, as the legs of his mistress is in a variety of different positions, and I reckon the ram here, or the goat, is a bit like that, moving so fast you can't even see the legs moving.

You know, just going everywhere, running here and there, with great ferocity, with great rage, and like any contest between a ram and a he-goat, there is no contest.

The ferocity, superior ability, agility, weaponry of the goat means that the ram cannot withstand the attack. The goat triumphs.

[7 : 05] His horn is broken off, and in its place, four prominent horns arise and grow toward the four winds of heaven. So now we've reached verse 9. Gabriel, the messenger, interprets these events in verses 21 and 22.

Have a look at what he says. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. The four horns that replace the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from this nation, but he will not have the same power.

Now let me put some actual names and places of all of this together for you. The king of Greece being spoken of is perhaps one of the most famous for us kings of Greece.

You will know his name. He is Alexander the Great. Alexander campaigned throughout the known world, and everywhere that Alexander went, he was victorious.

Between 334 BC to 323 BC, he demolished the Persian Empire, established an empire of his own that extended from Europe all the way through to India.

[8 : 17] A number of years ago, when I was in Pakistan, I met some people. He said, if you go up to the north of Pakistan, you'll find people that are a lot fair-skinned. I said, yeah, how come?

They said, because the troops of Alexander the Great made it that far. Some stayed, some intermarried, and hence the fairer skin that has its origin in Greek men that had travelled there.

That is a phenomenal distance. It is a phenomenal conquering. And by 323, he had conquered the known world. But he died, a relatively young man.

His kingdom was divided among his friends and his generals. Four prominent horns, replacing the one prominent horn of Alexander. But now check out verse 9.

There were four prominent horns in verse 8. In verse 9, the focus falls on one of these horns, and out of one of these horns comes another horn. You can see it there in verse 9.

[9 : 19] And this horn starts small, but it grows in power. And before long, its power extends to the south and to the east and stretches toward the beautiful land. Now, no prizes for guessing what that refers to.

The land of Palestine. Judea. Now, let's look at some of the things that this little horn does. This small, arrogant horn accomplishes some horrifying and significant things.

In verse 10, he reaches the host of heavens and throws down some of the starry host to earth and tramples upon them. You know what I think that's referring to? I think it's in reference to God's supernatural forces.

This human being has such power that he even affects God's supernatural forces. Two, in verse 11, he sets himself up to be as great as the prince or commander of the army of the Lord.

Now, remember whose army this is, the army of the Lord. So, who is the commander or prince of the army of the Lord? It is the Lord himself. So, in other words, this man sets himself up against God himself.

[10 : 23] Three, in verse 11, he takes away the daily sacrifice from him. Four, in verse 11, he throws down God's sanctuary.

This is probably a reference to the ravaging and desecration of the temple. Five, in verse 15, in verse 12, he prospers in everything that he does.

Now, if you've read through Daniel, you know, generally, people do pretty well in Daniel chapters 1 to 6. You know, when they get persecuted, they stand firm, they're okay, God rescues them.

But not from seven on. And here, the persecutor of God's people is very successful. This one does extraordinarily well.

He prospers in everything that he does, including the persecution of the people of God. And then six, he causes truth to be thrown down to the ground. What does that mean? I think it's possibly a reference to copies of God's law being destroyed and God's commandments being forbidden.

[11 : 25] I wonder if you can hear the terror of these verses. Can you hear the breadth and the length of this person's sacrilege? God's army, God's sanctuary, God's truth, is thrown down by this human ruler.

God and his people become victims of a human being. So who is this little horn? What is his identity? Well, verses 23 to 25, help us a little with it.

He arises in the latter part of the reign of the four, when wickedness is rife among rebels. He is a fierce looking king, a master of intrigue. Now, because we know the history of Greece, and the kings who come after Alexander, and the four who succeeded him, it is possible for us to pin down who this is.

And his name? Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Now, let's return to verses 13 and 14. You see, we who have read Daniel 1 to 7, know, don't we, that God is in control of all humanity, and of all the world. We know God's active. We also know that God's people are being abused here. Now, what is worse? We know that God's domain is being assaulted. And abused. So, our question, as we hear this chapter read, is the question that is asked by the Holy One, in verse 13.

[12 : 51] And it is this. How long? That is, how long can God's honour go on being questioned? How long can this little horn go on profaning God's place?

How long can God's glory be profaned for? How long before something happens that will set things right? How long before God will act to preserve his honour as God, and to judge those who've called it into question?

How long before this blasphemy and assault on the people of God is ended, and on God himself is ended? And in verse 14, Daniel's wish, our wishes, the Holy One's wish is answered.

It'll take 2,300 evenings and mornings. What on earth does that mean? Well, you could say the reference to evening and morning is evening and morning sacrifices, so you split it in two, 1,650 days, say, you know, a period of, say, three and a half years or whatever.

Okay, it could be that. I think you shouldn't take it too literally. I think one of the problems that people have with Daniel is they take these numbers too literally. I think it means a time cut short.

[14 : 06] That is, it's a fixed or limited time, that before God acts, but when he does, as he surely will, he will vindicate his name, his honour will be restored, his servants will be vindicated, and the sign of this will be the reconsecration of the sanctuary of God, the temple of God.

So friends, we've taken a lightning tour through this chapter. There's so much I've left unexplained, but I've done this for a reason. You see, I want you to get the big picture. I want you to see the

patterns and hear the patterns, and to help you see these patterns, I want you to come with me elsewhere in the Bible.

So pick up your Bibles, please, and turn with me to Isaiah chapter 14. Now, just in case you find Isaiah difficult, page 560, in your pew Bibles.

560, Isaiah chapter 40. Sorry, chapter 14. Now, I want you to just notice a few things about this chapter.

First, it is addressed to a rather enigmatic king of Babylon. It appears as though this king of Babylon is a symbol of human pride, especially among those who are given positions of rule and leadership.

[15:18] If you look at verses 4 to 8, you hear about the relief that pervades the earth, with this tyrant gone. Verses 9 to 11, express the astonishment of Sheol, the place of the dead, as it seems the humanity of this great ruler, and the way he's fallen, the way of all rulers.

Verses 12 to 15, where I want to concentrate. Have a look at verses 12 to 15, I'll read them to you. They say, How you are fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the dawn.

How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations bare. You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven, I will raise my throne above the stars of God, I will sit on the mount of assembly at the heights of Zaphon, I will ascend to the tops of the cloud, I will make myself like the Most High. But you were brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit. I wonder if you can see what's going on here, because when you notice the pattern, you will see what is going on here.

There is a battle being engaged in. This creature is taking his stand against his creator. He is exalting himself. He is snatching out of being God himself.

[16:37] His pride has become his God. The creature in his words and his actions is demonstrating his massive, overwhelming rule. Can you hear it? I will ascend to the heaven.

I will set my throne on high. I will make myself like the Most High. And Isaiah is clear. God cannot allow this.

The creature cannot make a stand against its creator and hope to survive. No matter how grand the creature may seem to be, the great ones of the earth will suffer judgment and end up in the grave. Now, can you hear the echoes of Daniel 8? Can you hear the same sort of thing? Because remember what happens in Daniel 8? A human being outreaches himself, this little horn. This little horn sets himself against God.

He sets himself against the people of God. He exalts himself. And the holy ones cry out, how long that is? How long before you do what you did and promised in Isaiah 14?

[17:43] How long before you act because the created cannot defy the creator for too long? There can only be one deity in the world and it's not the created. There is only one creator.

So the end will come to the little horn. But I want to move now to snapshot number three. So in the Bibles again, I want you to turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. If you're looking for page number 961. So 961, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. And Paul is talking about the coming of Jesus and the day of the Lord. You can see that in verse 3.

In verse 3 he says, that that day, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the day when he comes, will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.

Now look at verse 4. Verse 4 outlines his character and his actions. Can you see what his character and actions are? He opposes. He exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship.

[18:48] He takes his seat in the temple of God. He declares himself to be God. He doesn't wait to seek any endorsement.

He acts proudly and unilaterally, implicitly in his actions, and then explicitly in his words, he claims divinity or divine status. He usurps God's place.

He usurps God's rule. And he does so in an alliance with and the support of Satan. Friends, the actions of this man in 2 Thessalonians 2, this man of lawlessness, are anti-God.

His character is anti-Christ. He is open, defiant, bold, aggressive, and a counterfeit. Now let's turn to his end. Have a look at verse 3.

Verse 3 spills the end of this man. He is the man of lawlessness who is one with a predetermined end. He is destined for destruction. And verse 8 gives us a picture of his end. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth.

[19:55] That is, the manifestation of Jesus in the world and his coming will annihilate this lawless one. Can you hear the echoes? Isaiah 14. Daniel 8.

God is saying that he has a future for such people. He has it mapped out. It's a future of destruction and judgment. Fourth snapshot is contained in the book of Revelation.

Turn with me to Revelation 13. If you are after a page number, 1002. 1002. So please look at it with me.

In verse 1 of chapter 13 you find a dragon who represents the devil. The dragon, that is the devil, gives power and throne and great authority to a beast.

Verse 4 tells us in chapter 13 that the beast is worshipped as God. Verse 5 tells us that the beast is proud, boastful and blasphemous. That is, he slanders God's name, God's dwelling place, God's people.

[21 : 02] He wages war against God's people and is successful. Humanity is sucked in en masse. May I turn to Revelation chapter 19 where we are told of the end of the beast.

Revelation 19. Look at verse 13. The Son of God, who is the Word of God, marches out with the armies of heaven.

He wages war with the sword of his mouth. Do you remember back to Thessalonians? The breath of his mouth. He wages war with the sword of his mouth, the Word of God. Then in verse 20, the beast is captured and he and his prophets are thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Can you see the pattern again? Humans. But humans who are like beasts in that they don't submit to God. Humans who exalt themselves over their creator.

But remember, there is only one creator. There is only one God. God can have no opposition. No competitor who will last.

[22 : 11] Now friends, these snapshots are very revealing because they show humans that they're most wicked. These characters are the most wicked. Humans who defy God. Humans who set out to shake their fist at God and say, I will do things my own way without you.

But these humans show us a sobering reality that the rest of the Bible recognises. And that reality is that such figures in history are simply overblown, exaggerated, cosmically powered versions of ourself.

Let me explain by getting you to look at Isaiah 2. So Isaiah 2. Thanks for putting up with all this Bible flipping this morning. It's very interesting, isn't it?

Isaiah 2, page 550 of your pew Bibles. And I want you to look at it with me. The thing that I want you to notice about this passage is that it is not addressed to people like the King of Babylon, like Antiochus Epiphanes, like a first century Roman general, or some end time person from Revelation. No, it's addressed to normal human beings. That is, people like you and me who lived in Israel. And look at what it says. It says to these people that they are idolaters.

[23 : 34] However, let me tell you, their idols are not those which you could sort of sit in the corner of your house. That is little figurines with emerald studded navels and all of those sorts of things. No, the idol here is human pride.

Look at it in verse 11. So verse 11. They are haughty-eyed people. Remember, these are normal people, ordinary people. Haughty-eyed. Verse 12 says they are proud and lofty.

Verse 17 speaks of their haughtiness and their pride. Verse 17 goes on to speak of a day when God alone will be exalted. And on that day, humans who exalt themselves will hide in the caves of the rocks and the holes in the ground.

And then in verse 22, check it out, he hones in on the ultimate idol. Friends, we are about to meet the idol that sits under every other idol.

It is what? Mortals. Human beings. who are not divine, but who have God given breath in their nostrils.

[24 : 41] And before God they are of no account. Friends, the propensity of all humans is the propensity which is blown out of proportion in Isaiah 14, Daniel 8, 2 Thessalonians 2 and the book of Revelation.

It is a propensity that dwells in the heart of every human being. It is the propensity towards self-confidence. It is the disposition to say to God, I know better than you.

It is to exalt ourselves over God and to declare to Him that He really doesn't know what is best for us but we do. And we can forge our own existence in His world.

Friends, please hear me. The great tyrants we have met today in Scripture will have their day. But so will all hearts who are filled with the same self-exaltation.

And deep down our hearts are filled with the same self-confidence and independence. It filled the hearts of Adam and Eve which is why Adam and Eve are painted for us at the beginning of the Bible so we can see what human beings are like.

[25 : 57] And what are they like? God says, you can have all of this. Don't touch that. And they say, hmm, that looks good.

Let's touch that. Let's take that. Let's snatch after that. Can you see what they're actually snatching out after? They're snatching out after being God themselves. themselves. Friends, what fills the hearts of Adam and Eve so often fills our hearts as well.

And please hear such human pride, such human self-confidence, human self-exaltation cannot last when time ends. For when the day of the Lord arrives, God alone will be exalted.

on that day there will be nowhere to hide from His glory and majesty. Actually, friends, there is one place to hide. There will be one place to hide on that day when the Lord Jesus comes.

And that place is in the humility of Jesus, the one man who lived rightly before God and who can stand before God and who atoned for the sin of all other humans.

[27 : 08] that place is the cool shade of the cross of Christ. For as we come to Christ, we put our arrogance aside, don't we?

We depend upon God's means of forgiveness. We say to God, you've got it right. I cannot stand before you without Him. We trust in His Word.

We accept that He alone is worth trusting. Please understand what I'm saying. The real enemy in our world is not the devil, not the king of Babylon, not Antiochus Epiphanes, not the host of others who have followed them.

The real enemy, friends, is us. It is we mortal human beings. It is the sin that lurks within our heart to exalt ourselves above God.

Friends, if this is you, then let me urge you to turn toward Jesus for in Him alone is shelter and salvation. Please accept Him.

[28 : 18] Please seek forgiveness through Him. Please put your confidence in Him and in Him alone. For He is God's appointed ruler of all the earth, as we saw last week in chapter 7.

Let's pray. Lord God, we acknowledge that in our heart lurks the same things that we find in the heart of Adam and Eve and which we see other blown in many figures through history who open-handedly defy you.

Now, Father, in our own little ways we have defied you as well and told you that we know better than you. Please forgive us this sin. Thank you that in Jesus you have given us a place where we might find shelter and forgiveness.

Thank you for the remembrance of this and the Lord's Supper that we'll celebrate shortly. Thank you for your Son and we pray this in His name. Amen.