

The Medo-Persian and Greek Empires

Daniel 8:1-22

Daniel 8:1-22 - *"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. ² I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.*

⁵ 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. ⁶ Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. ⁷ 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.

⁸ Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. ⁹ And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. ¹⁰ And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. ¹¹ He 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. ¹² Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered.

¹³ 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?"

¹⁴ And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days;^[a] then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

Gabriel Interprets the Vision

¹⁵ Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." ¹⁷ 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."

18 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. 19 And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. 20 The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia. 21 And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. 22 As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power."

Background Notes

Daniel received the second vision from the Lord in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, two years after Daniel's first vision of chapter 7. The first vision came in the first year of Belshazzar's reign, about twelve years before the events of chapter 5 where Belshazzar and the Babylonian Empire fell to the Medo-Persians.

Daniel had the prophetic vision of chapter 8 while he was in Babylon, but the setting of the vision was in the citadel of *Shushan* or *Susa*. Susa would later become the capital of the Persian Empire. Susa was the city where the events of the Book of Esther took place. It was also the city in which Nehemiah served the Persian king before he returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.

In this vision, Daniel saw a ram with two horns and a male goat with a large horn. We don't have to wonder about the meaning of the two animals in the vision because the interpretation is given to us in verses 20-21. The ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire and thus corresponds to the bear of Daniel 7. The goat represents the Greek Empire and thus corresponds to the leopard of Daniel 7.

In verses 15-16 we see that the angel Gabriel was sent to give Daniel the interpretation of the vision. The male voice instructing Gabriel was possibly the voice of God. Remember the angel Gabriel brought important messages from the Lord to both Zacharias and Mary in Luke 1. Michael is the only other holy angel named in the Bible.

Doctrinal Points

1. The ram of Daniel 8 represents the Medo-Persian Empire.

The two unequal horns of the ram correspond to the lopsided bear of Daniel 7, and represent the Medo-Persian Empire in which the Persians became dominant over the Medes. The Persians carried a symbol of a ram's head into battle because the ram represented the guardian of the spirit of the Persians. The Persian Empire expanded its territory (v4) as the ram pushed at other powers to the west and north and south. These three directions probably correspond to the three ribs that were in the bear's mouth in Daniel 7, and they represent three sub-kingdoms or regions that were conquered and brought into the Persian Empire. So the ram of Daniel 8 represents the Medo-Persian Empire.

2. The goat of Daniel 8 represents the Greek Empire.

As the leopard of Daniel 7 had four wings for speed, so the goat of Daniel 8 is characterized by speed in that it traveled over all the land without touching the surface. The goat came from the west, corresponding to rapid expansion of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was represented by the large, conspicuous “notable” horn between the goat’s eyes.

Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire completely overwhelmed the Persian Empire and expanded until there were no more enemies to overcome. It is said that Alexander the Great cried because there were no more worlds to conquer. As the vision predicted, Alexander the Great magnified himself, but was broken – not by another kingdom, but by God Himself. Alexander the Great died, while living a dissolute lifestyle, when he was only thirty-two years old. Alexander the Great is never called “great” in the Bible.

After Alexander’s death, the Greek Empire was divided into four separate kingdoms, represented by the four horns coming up toward the winds of heaven. These horns took the place of the large horn on the goat’s head. So the goat of Daniel 8 represents the Greek Empire.

3. The little horn of Daniel 8 represents Antiochus IV of the Seleucid Kingdom.

Verse 9 tells us that a small horn emerged out of one of four horns, or kingdoms, that replaced the large horn of Alexander the Great. In verse 10 we see that this little horn caused disruption for the Jewish people, who are referred to here as the “host of heaven.” Remember God promised Abraham that the Jewish people would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. This “little horn” deified himself and desecrated the Temple, and put an end to all sacrifices on the altar. God allowed this little horn to have his way over the Jewish people for a time as an instrument of God’s discipline of his people (v12).

Who was this “little horn”? He was Antiochus IV of the Seleucid Kingdom who ruled from 175BC down to 163BC. The Seleucid Kingdom was one of the four divisions of the Greek Empire after the death of Alexander the Great. The Seleucid Kingdom consisted of Syria to the north of Israel, as well as territories to the northeast that included what is now Iraq and Iran. It also included a good portion of what is now Turkey.

Antiochus IV was ruthless in his treatment of the Jewish people. According to 2 Maccabees, in one attack on Jerusalem 80,000 Jewish people were either killed or taken into captivity in just three days. Antiochus IV desecrated the Temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar. He deified himself, and thus became known as “Antiochus Epiphanes.” He destroyed many copies of Scripture -- all that he could get his hands on. In our next talk we will see that this little horn of history is a picture (or type) of a future ruler who will come in the end times.

In verses 13-14 we read that persecution of the Jewish people under Antiochus IV would go on for 2300 days. This period of time was from 171BC to December 165BC. After the victories of the Maccabees over the Syrians, the Temple

was cleansed and Temple worship was restored. That cleansing of the Temple is still remembered today by the Jewish people in their annual festival, Hanukkah. The little horn of Daniel 8 represents Antiochus IV of the Seleucid Kingdom.

Practical Application

Seek, and you will find!

In Matthew 7:7, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”* Where do we see this principle in Daniel 8? We see it in verse 15: *“Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man.”* The Angel Gabriel gave Daniel the meaning of the vision.

Do you see the application? What should we do if we want to understand the meaning of some Scripture, for example? Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find!

Our Lord's exhortation in Matthew 7:7-8 can certainly be applied to understanding Scripture. Read commentaries which have been written on Scripture. Listen to the preaching and exposition of God's Word. Pray and ask for understanding.

Our Lord does not need to send the angel Gabriel to give us interpretations today because we as believers have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. He will guide us into the truth of Scripture. John 16:13 says, *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”*

Seek, and you will find!