

Daniel 8:1-14

Chapters 8-12 shifts the focus of attention back to the Jewish people during the Times of the Gentiles. It is therefore addressed to Jews and is written in Hebrew. Chapter 8 reports a vision Daniel had that concerns the Second and Third world empires he described in the visions of Neb in Chapter two and himself in Chapter 7. We are therefore dealing with events between the 6th and 2nd Centuries BC.

The chapter can be divided into three parts:

- a. The Vision in verses 1-14.
- b. The Interpretation in verses 15-26.
- c. The Conclusion, verse 27.

The Vision, vs 1-14.

Daniel 8 opens with a vision described in verses 1-14. The vision can be divided as follows:

- a. Historical Background, vs 1-2
- b. The Ram, vs 3-4.
- c. The He-Goat, vs 5-14.

Historical Background vs 1-2.

Vs 1, In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me.

In verse 1, Daniel gives us some historical context. *In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I Daniel had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me.* . This would be 551 BC, two years after Daniel had the vision in chapter 7.

Vs 2, In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.

At the time of Daniel's vision, Susa was a small city roughly 230 miles east of Babylon and 120 miles north of the Persian Gulf. In the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC it was to become a prominent and important city in the ancient near east. Elam was a territory just to the east of Babylon in what is now western Iran. The Ulai canal was a connecting canal between two rivers in Susa. Some argued that Daniel was physically transported to Susa while most argued he saw himself there while in the vision.

The Ram vs 3-4.

Vs 3, I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.

Daniel is beside the Ulai canal, which some commentators feel gave him a panoramic view of the city and its surrounding area. There was a ram before him. Verse 20 explains this ram is the Medo-Persian empire.

Note the Ram had *two horns*, one *longer than the other* that *grew up later*. One horn represents the Medes, while the other the Persians. The Medes were the first on the scene, but the Persians soon eclipsed them in power and influence, hence its horn was longer and grew up later.

The ram describes the same empire Neb saw as the chest and arms of silver in 2:32 and Daniel saw as the lopsided bear in 7:5.

Vs 4, I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.

Verse 4 describes the actions of the ram. Note these events had not yet occurred, yet Daniel describes the expansion of the Medo-Persian Empire. It would charge to the west and conquer Babylon, Syria, and Asia Minor. It would charge to the north and seize Armenia and Scythia, and it would charge to the south conquering Egypt and Ethiopia. No kingdom could or did withstand it. It therefore *did as it pleased and became great*.

The He-Goat, vs 5-14.

Vs 5, As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.

Daniel next sees *a goat*. Some translations have He-goat. The literal term in Hebrew means the buck of the goats. Note it has a *prominent horn*. This is not like the ram with two horns. It is a single horn. Verse 21 explains the goat is the King of the Greek empire and the prominent horn represents its first king, Alexander the Great. Remember this vision occurs 195 yrs before Alexander's birth!

It came from the west. At the age of 20, Alexander became King of Macedonia when his father died. He soon consolidated his power over the Greek city states by defeating Thebes in 335 BC. He then began his conquest of the Medo-Persian empire in 334 BC by invading western Turkey.

The vision notes the goat crossed *the whole earth*. The *whole earth* is a reference to the grant God gave Alexander (see Dan 2:39) and although Alexander never realized the full extent of what God gave him, his ultimate empire exceeded the size of both the Babylonian and M-P empires by a large factor.

Note also Alexander crossed *the whole earth without touching the ground*. This is a reference to the speed of his conquest. Starting in 334 BC Alexander rapidly moved from Macedonia eastward and definitively finished off the M-P in 330 BC. He then marched on into Afghanistan and now Pakistan before turning back as his army refused to go any further eastward in 325 BC. At this point Alexander's empire stretched from Greece to the Indus River, a total of over 2000 miles.

Finally, note the description of the He-goat corresponds to the belly and legs of bronze in Neb's vision of Dan 2 and the leopard with four wings of Dan 7.

The Destruction of the Ram, vs 6-7.

Vs 6, It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage.

Verse 6 describes Alexander's attack on the M-P empire. The verse notes the goat charged it in *great rage*. In 490 BC Darius the Great had attempted to invade Greece but failed. His son Xerxes then tried in 480 BC and again failed. However, both invasions were violent and caused widespread damage for which the Greeks never forgave them. Always present on their eastern border, the M-P were a terrifying specter which haunted the Greek psyche. Given a chance to invade, the Greeks wanted to vanquish their long-standing foe with a vengeance.

Vs 7a, I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it.

Verse 7a describes Alexander's conquest of the MPE. Alexander destroyed the MPE in three major battles, each prophetically noted in verse 7.

- a. Granicus in 334 BC, fought in western Turkey in which Alexander freed all the Greek cities in Asia Minor and claimed it for Greek rule (the shattering of one horn).
- b. Issus in 333 BC, fought in south-eastern Turkey, in which the Levant and Egypt came under Alexander's rule (the shattering of the other horn).
- c. Gaugamela in 331 BC, fought in Iraq) in which Alexander conquered the M-P homeland (the ram was powerless to stand against it).

Vs 7b, the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power.

Following Gaugamela, Alexander then systematically destroyed and conquered the remaining important cities of the MPE (Susa, Persopolis, and Ecbatana). Daniel describes this prophetically as *the goat knocked it the ground and trampled on it*.

Following his defeat at Gaugamela, Darius attempted to regroup but was unable to do so. Nothing could rescue him; hence Daniel was correct when he said *none could rescue the ram from its power*.

The Division of the Four Horns, vs 8.

Vs 8, The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

Verse 8 describes Alexander's reign and subsequent death. *The goat became very great*. At the apex of his power, Alexander's kingdom extended from Greece to India. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest military leaders of all time.

Verse 8 also describes the death of Alexander and the subsequent division of his empire. Alexander reached the Indus River in 325 BC but went no further as his army and generals refused to fight. From there he turned westward and returned to Susa, the administrative center of the Persian empire, in the spring of 324 BC. Over the next year, Alexander dealt with multiple internal political and military issues. While in Babylon in June 323 BC he was suddenly seized with an illness following a large banquet and

died at the age of 33 thus fulfilling Daniel's prophecy, *but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off.*

In its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven. Following Alexander's death, his kingdom was split into four parts, each under the control of one of his generals. This division was messy and bloody and sorted itself out over a period of about 20 years. The word in Greek for successor is Diodachos, and the wars of succession for Alexander's empire are called the Diodachi wars. Cassander took Macedonia and Greece in the west. Lysimachus took Thrace and Bithynia in the north (what would later be called Pergamon and is in Asia Minor), Ptolemy took Egypt, Israel, and Arabia Petrea in the south, and Seleucus took Syria, Babylonia, Persia, and the territories to the east.

The Little Horn, Antiochus Epiphanes, vs 9-14.

Vs 9, Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land.

Out of one of them came another horn. Daniel now sees a horn arising out of one of these four horns described in verse 8. This means the horn Daniel is now describing comes from either the Macedonian Kingdom in the west, the Pergamon kingdom in the North (Asia Minor), the Ptolemaic kingdom in the south, or the Seleucid empire in the east.

It is important to note this horn is different from the horn described in Dan 7: 8. The little horn of Dan 7:8 arises out of the fourth stage of the Roman Imperialistic Empire. In Dan 8:9 the horn arises from the remnants of Alexander's empire. They are not the same.

Which started small and grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. Who is this horn? Most conservative Bible scholars agree the little horn of Dan 7:8 is the Anti-Christ while the little horn of Dan 8:9 is Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus the 4th was a Seleucid whose father was Antiochus the III. He came to power in 175 BC and ruled to 164 BC. Upon taking the throne he immediately began to extend his empire. He went east and conquered lands east of Mesopotamia, then went south and attacked the Ptolemaic Empire, and then west and attacked Israel (which was under Ptolemaic control). The term, the *beautiful land* is a reference to Israel (see Ez 20:6, Dan 11:16, 41).

Vs 10, It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.

Verse 10 elaborates the attack Antiochus made against Israel. The word *it* refers to Antiochus. The word *grew* means to become great. The phrases, *host of the heavens*, and *starry host*, are references to Israel (see Gen 15:5, Ex 12:41). *He threw some to the ground and trampled on them*, is a reference to his cruelty and attempted subjugation of the Jews in the years 168-167 BC. The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees describe Antiochus and his campaign and are important adjuncts for the study of this period.

Here is a quote from 1st Maccabees 1:37-64 (abbreviated): “Thus, they shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary, and defiled it: Insomuch that the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them: whereupon the city was made an habitation of strangers, and became strange to those that were born in her; and her own children left her. Moreover, King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, and everyone should leave his laws, so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king. That they should also leave their children uncircumcised and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: To the end they might forget the law and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said he should die. At which time according to the commandment they put to death certain women that had caused their children to be circumcised. And they hanged the infants about their necks, and rifled their houses, and slew them that had circumcised them, and there was very great wrath upon Israel.”

Vs 11, It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down.

Verses 11 and 12 describe a specific action of Antiochus known as the “abomination of desolation”. The first component of this act is seen in verse 11.

It again refers to Antiochus. Set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord, is an act of self-deification. History confirms this as Antiochus chose to be called “Epiphanes” which means God-manifest.

Notice *it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down.* Antiochus was anxious to fully Hellenize Israel, so he attempted to fully do away with the Jewish sacrificial system. He therefore entered the temple, removed its furnishings, and abolished its sacrifices.

1st Maccabees 1:39-40 records the following: “Her sanctuary was laid waste like a wilderness, her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into reproach, her honor into contempt, As had been her glory, so was her dishonor increased, and her excellency was turned into mourning”.

Maccabees goes on to say: “burnt offerings and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that thy should profane the sabbaths and festival days; and pollute the sanctuary and holy people; set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine’s flesh forbid and unclean beasts”.

2nd Maccabees 6:1-5, “Not long after this the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their fathers and cease to live by the laws of God, and also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus the Friend of Strangers, as did the people who dwelt in that place. Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles who dallied with harlots and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifices that were unfit. The altar was covered with abominable offerings which were forbidden by the laws”.

Vs 12, *Because of rebellion, the Lord's people^[a] and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.*

This verse is a summary verse of the success of Antiochus. *Because of rebellion*. This phrase is in reference to Antiochus rebelling against God. The NLT has a nice way of expressing this thought; the *Army of heaven was restrained from responding to this rebellion*. In other words, God permitted it in his sovereign will.

The Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. We have already seen how Antiochus persecuted the Jewish people and disrupted the Levitical system.

And truth was thrown to the ground. Truth is a reference to the Mosaic Law. It was *thrown to the ground* as Antiochus was mostly successful in his Hellenizing efforts.

In summary, starting in 168 BC, Antiochus dominated and persecuted the nation of Israel, plundered the temple, banned the Levitical system of sacrifice and festivals, built a statue to Zeus in the temple, sacrificed a pig on the alter, and compelled the Jews to worship it.

Vs 13, *Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?"*

Verse 13-14 show that God had determined a limit to the duration of Antiochus's activities. Verse 13 notes one angel asking a question and in verse 14 the other answering.

The question in verse 13 asks how long will Antiochus be allowed to ban the daily sacrifice, have the statue of Zeus in the temple, and allow the persecution of the people?

Vs 14, *He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."*

Now the other angel responds. *It will take 2300 evenings and mornings*. Evenings and mornings is a reference to one day, hence the abomination and persecution of Antiochus will last 2300 days. We know from history the people of Israel finally rebelled against Antiochus's rule. This was known as the Maccabean revolt which started in 167 BC. The Maccabees were able to defeat Antiochus and drove his army out of Israel back to Syria. The temple was finally reclaimed and cleansed on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev 165 BC (the Jews now celebrate Hanukkah to commemorate this fact). Counting back 2300 days means the abomination started on Sept 9, 171 BC. And now a speculation. When Antiochus first came to power in 175, Onias III was the chief high priest in Israel, and he vigorously opposed the Hellenization of the country. Antiochus therefore replaced Onias with his wicked brother Jason who in 174 BC was replaced by his more wicked brother Menelaus as Menelaus bribed Antiochus for the position. Menelaus was corrupt and embraced Greek culture along with its gods. He assassinated his brother Onias in 171. Though the exact date of his death is unknown some have speculated it was Sept 9, 171 BC. With Onias dead, no official religious opposition to the Greek takeover of the priesthood existed, and the abomination process could start.

