

Mid Week • Daniel 8

INTRODUCTION

Last week, I mentioned at the beginning of the study that the book of Daniel divide nicely into two-halves, Chs. 1-6 give us a brief historical narrative of some events that took place in Daniel's life from his youth to his last days.

Then chs 7-12 give us several of the visions he received.

The first is given in ch. 7, which took place during the first year of the reign of King Belshazzar when Daniel was in his 70's.

As we saw last week, Daniel is given a forecast of the world empires that will rule from that day till the end when the Messiah comes and establishes his kingdom.

He saw four beasts rising up out of the Mediterranean, one after another: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and then a ferocious monster with 10 horns.

While Daniel watched he saw an 11th horn emerge that came to dominate the others and took the prominent place in the vision.

This 11th horn made war on the people of God and overcame them for a short period of time, but then the heavenly court was assembled and put his rebellion down once and for all.

Now in ch. 8, Daniel is given a more detailed vision of the 2nd and 3rd empires.

Something will take place in the last years of the 3rd empire's dominion that will serve as a *precursor* to and *harbinger* of events in the last days.

One last note before we begin reading -- with v. 1, we're back to the Hebrew language.

From ch. 2 through 7 Daniel wrote in Aramaic, the language of the Babylonians, but now we're back to Hebrew.

CHAPTER 8

¹In 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. ²I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel [fortress-palace], which *is* in the province of Elam [Elam is one of the many regions that make up Persia]; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. ³Then 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. ⁴I 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.

Chapter 8 takes place two years *after* chapter 7 and describes the kingdoms that will follow Babylon after it falls.

God carried Daniel in a vision to the capital of Persia, the palace in Susa, or as it's called here Shushan.

Shushan was about 200 miles east of Babylon, and no doubt a city that Daniel

would have visited in his earlier years as a high official in the court of Babylon.

At the time that Daniel had this vision, while Susa was an important city, it likely did not have a palace, but he envisions one.

A hundred years later, the Persian king Xerxes built a magnificent palace in Susa.

In fact, that's where the events of Esther take place and where Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to the king.

Daniel sees this palace in a vision.

In v. 20, we learn that *the ram* represents Medo-Persia.

The emblem of Persia was a ram; this was the animal they picked to describe themselves, just as the Babylonians liked to identify themselves with the lion.

While most ancient kings wore a typical crown as we think of them, the diadem; the king of Persia wore a jeweled ram's head of gold instead of the usual diadem.

This ram had two horns, one higher than the other, symbolizing the Medes and the Persians.

In the early days of the Median-Persian alliance, the Medes dominated their allies the Persians – in fact, subjugated would be a better word.

But over time, the Persians rose to take the lead in the alliance.

And so in Daniel's vision, he sees two horns; the higher of the two had come up after the first.

This ram stands by a river.

It has pushed to the west, north and south and crushed all opposition before it.

But now it just stands by this river – as though the river has formed a border, and boundary it cannot get over.

Indeed this is what happened to the Persians.

They quickly defeated the Babylonians, then pressed west, north and south, taking all Mesopotamia, Anatolia (Asia Minor – Turkey), Syria, the northwest part of the Saudi Arabian peninsula, down Israel and in to Egypt.

But as they attempted to press westward beyond Anatolia and into the Aegean Sea area, they ran into the Greeks who had done an effective job of colonizing this entire area and most of the coast of Anatolia.

The problem with the Greeks prior to this time was that they were highly tribal in nature.

They were fragmented into different groups and interests.

They shared a common language and culture but lacked the glue that would hold them together.

In fact, many of the Greek colonies and city-states that existed at this time fought each other in brutal wars.

The contest between Athens and Sparta is well-known.

When the Persians invaded Babylon, her armies were reinforced with Greek mercenaries who had come east to fight and win their fortune.

So the Greeks were a fractured society.

But by the time the Medo-Persian ram had pressed to the shores of the Aegean, and began to look across the water at the ripe plum of the mainland of Greece,

the situation in Greece had changed dramatically.

Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great's Father, had rallied the Macedonians into a superb fighting force and had managed to exert his will over the Greek city-states.

He accomplished what previous Greeks had failed to do -- unify the Greeks under *one head*.

But he was assassinated as he prepared to address the growing Persian threat on their eastern borders.

It fell to his son, Alexander, to carry on in his father's plan.

And that is who is represented by the next part of the vision . . .

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

Daniel is standing there looking at the ram who seems stalled by the edge of a river.

The River Ulai that is mentioned in v. 2 is next to Susa, Shushan.

Though the Persians had advanced all the way to the western coast of Anatolia, in his vision, Daniel sees the ram stalled along the banks of a river at the capital of the Persian Empire.

The spiritual meaning is that the authority and extension of the Persians has reached it's potential – it can go no further.

It's now time for another kingdom to arise and supplant the Persians.

That kingdom is represented by the he-goat in vs. 5-7.

As v. 21 tells us, the he-goat represents the *Greeks* under the leadership of Alexander the Great, pictured by the notable horn on the he-goat's head.

The description of the he-goat's swiftness reminds us of the 3rd beast in ch. 7, the leopard with 4 wings which moves with such subtle swiftness.

Alexander took only 12 years to conquer the whole known world.

The goat is a fitting symbol for the Greeks because it arises out of their own mythology.

Caranus, the first king of Macedonia, was said to have been led by goats to the city of Edessa, which later he made the center of his kingdom, changing its name to Aege, or "goat-city."

Alexander, as heir to the Macedonian throne would be tied to this goat-mythology.

In v. 7 we read how the he-goat attacks the ram with great wrath and anger.

Indeed, Alexander saw it as part of his life's duty to repel the Persian invasions and incursions into Greek territory.

The Persians had been merciless and cruel to the Greeks they had encountered as they made their way west, and Greek sensitivities were raw.

So Alexander met the Persians with an all out campaign of warfare that was calculated to offer no mercy.
In 331 B.C. Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius and one year later conquered the territory of Persia.

⁸Therefore 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.

It's at this point that Daniel's vision becomes so detailed that unless we take it piece by piece we can get easily confused.

V. 22 tells us that the broken horn and the 4 horns that replace it represent the fall of the first king and the division of the Greek empire into four smaller kingdoms under four lesser rulers.

History tells us this is precisely what happened.

With Alexander's untimely death at a mere 30 years of age, at the zenith of his power, because no provision had been made for a peaceful passing of the throne to his successor, his 4 chief generals divided the empire among themselves and retired to their own capitals to enjoy their wealth and power.

Their names were:

- 1) Seleucus in the **east**, who controlled Syria, Babylonia, and Media;
- 2) Cassander in the **west**, including Macedonia, Thessaly, and Greece;
- 3) Ptolemy in the **south**, covering Egypt and Cyprus;
- 4) And Lysimachus in the **north**, covering Thrace, Cappadocia, and northern Asia Minor.

Now the vision becomes a bit more challenging to interpret . . .

⁹And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹He 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. ¹²Because 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.

Obviously we are looking at one very bad boy here.

But just who is this? Is this an historical figure who's already lived, or are we looking into the future?

These are questions that have challenged bible students for many generations. Let's see if we can't sort things out a bit . . .

First of all, we're confronted with another "little horn."

We've already seen a little horn – where? In ch. 7.

What beast was it associated with? The 4th.

Yet the he-goat, which represents Greece, would link up with the 3rd beast of chapter 7, the leopard.

So, this little horn is different from the little horn of ch. 7, yet the *title*

means we are to link the two somehow.

This little horn comes out of one of the 4 horns that rise up after the big horn on the he-goat is broken off.

Horns consistently represent kings or rulers in these visions of Daniel, so it's safe to conclude this is a ruler.

He comes out of one of the 4 kingdoms that come out of the division of the Greek Empire after Alexander.

The realm of his influence presses south, east, and into the *Glorious Land* – meaning what? Israel!

This little horn then grows, in fact, it rises up into the sky and even seems to be able to affect the powers of the heaven.

He claims for himself the power of a god and calls for an end to the daily offerings that are offered to Yahweh in the temple in Jerusalem.

With military troops, he enforces his will, and begins a process of change that strikes at the very heart of reality and truth.

And unbelievably, he is successful in his campaign – at least for a time.

So, just who is this and what does all of this mean?

As we saw last week, the “little horn” in 7:8 represented the Antichrist, the world ruler of the final world empire before the return of Christ to earth.

But *this* “little horn” comes out from one of the four horns; that is, he is a leader who comes out of one of the four divisions of Alexander’s kingdom. So, this “little horn” is *not* the Antichrist of the “latter days,” although he has a definite connection with him.

This “little horn” conquers nations to the south and east of his original position, and then invades Israel.

He not only attacks the Jews *militarily*, but also *religiously*; for he tries to destroy their faith by stopping the sacrifices in the temple.

Look at what it says he will do in v. 13 . . .

¹³Then 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?”

For Daniel’s benefit in understanding what he is seeing, he is allowed to eavesdrop on the conversation between a couple angels.

He overhears one angel ask another what the time frame is for all this and for it all to be fulfilled.

The little horn will not only end the daily sacrifices to Yahweh, he will defile the temple with some kind of sacrilege that is called the “transgression of desolation.”

That’s language that sounds a lot like the phrase, “abomination of desolation” we encounter in Daniel 9 and in the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 regarding the last days.

The answer to the angels’ question of how long comes in v. 14 . . .

¹⁴And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”

It will take 2,300 days.

But a little explanation is needed here.

You see, the word *days* is literally, “evenings-mornings.”

And we need to understand it in light of the context.

Let’s read vs. 13 & 14 again, together!

13Then 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?”

14And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred evenings-mornings; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”

The 2300 applies not 24 hour days but to the daily sacrifices of v. 13, which were offered in the *morning* and the *evening*.

2300 offerings would translate into 1150 days.

At the conclusion of that time, the sanctuary that had been defiled would be cleansed and restored to its rightful place in the nation’s life.

Who is this man, this little horn?

History names him: *Antiochus IV*, also known as *Antiochus Epiphanes*, a wicked leader who came out of Syria, one of the four divisions of Alexander’s empire.

He did indeed press his borders east and south, taking Persia and Egypt and invading Israel.

He was bent on a campaign of spreading the Greek culture far and wide and was especially angered by the oppositions of the Jews who maintained a fierce loyalty to their God.

Remember that this was after the return of the Jews from their exile in Babylon so they had become fiercely resistant to idolatry in any and all forms.

They had rebuilt their temple and reconsecrated it to God’s glory and service.

When they saw Antiochus’ attempt to set up a statue to Zeus in the temple they flipped.

Antiochus became so enraged at the Jewish opposition to his reforms that he decided to do something so heinous it would cause the Jews to either submit or break into outright rebellion so he could massacre them.

He went into the temple holy places, and sacrificed a pig on the Jewish altar, then sprinkled its blood around the courts.

Imagine how the orthodox Jews felt about this.

History tells us that the Jews were so horrified they let the temple lay desolate until December, 165 B.C., when the Jewish patriot, Judas Maccabeus, rededicated the temple and cleansed it.

The total number of days between the desecration and re-dedication was 1150 days, just as foretold.

But this does not exhaust the vision’s meaning.

Let’s read on to see the angel’s interpretation of the rest of this . . .

15Then 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.*"

The angel Gabriel is sent to give Daniel an understanding of what he has seen.

At first, when Daniel looks, he sees someone whose basic form looks like a human being.

But as he draws closer, telling Daniel that he's come to impart understanding, Daniel is overwhelmed by the majesty and glory of Gabriel and he passes out . . .

18Now, 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.

23 "And in the latter time of their kingdom, When the transgressors have reached their fullness, A king shall arise, Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes.

24 His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, And shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty, and *also* the holy people.

25 "Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt *himself* in his heart. He shall destroy many in *their* prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; But he shall be broken without *human* means.

26 "And the vision of the evenings and mornings Which was told is true; Therefore seal up the vision, For it refers to many days in the future."

In vs. 17-26, Gabriel makes it clear that the vision reaches *to the time of the end*, the closing years of Jewish history.

He said a severe and cunning king would rise to devastate property and destroy people in order to expand his kingdom.

The nation Israel would be a special target of his oppression.

In subjugating the Jews many would lose their lives just when they thought they were safe.

His antagonism against Israel would extend to Israel's God, who Gabriel calls "the Prince of princes."

Yet this mighty conqueror himself would be destroyed by supernatural power.

Let me give a bit more back-ground on Antiochus . . .

After murdering his brother in 175 B.C, who was the rightful heir to the throne of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria, Antiochus came to power.

In 170 B.C., he invaded Egypt and defeated Ptolemy and proclaimed himself king in Egypt.

On his return from this conquest, trouble broke out in Jerusalem so he decided to subdue the Jews with his policy of enforcing Greek culture and society. The Jewish revolt was put down, the temple desecrated, and the temple treasury plundered.

Antiochus' fortunes took a turn for the worse in 168 when Rome, which had begun extending its influence at this time, sided with Egypt to oppose Antiochus. He had to withdraw from Egypt and decided to turn Israel into a buffer state between Syria and Roman-controlled Egypt.

He knew the Jews already hated him and would side with the Romans if they had a chance, so he followed a policy of extreme force to try and cow the Jews into submission, *or* bring any would-be rebels to the surface where he could wipe them out and leave nothing but a compliant wasteland behind him.

He attacked and burned Jerusalem, killing multitudes.

The Jews were forbidden to follow the Law in observing the Sabbath, their annual feasts, and traditional sacrifices, as well as the circumcision of children.

Altars to idols were set up in Jerusalem and the Jews were ordered to offer unclean sacrifices and to eat swine's flesh or be penalized by death.

Antiochus demanded that people give him the title *Epiphanes*, meaning "the Manifested One," a title that was reserved for the gods when they occasionally decided to take on human form and walk the earth.

While his supporters called him *Antiochus Epiphanes*, the Jews called him *Epimanes*, which means "the Madman."

There is no question among scholars that Antiochus is in view in this prophecy.

What was prophesied was fulfilled *literally* through him.

But only in part.

There are elements of this prophecy that Antiochus approaches in fulfillment but don't find their completion in him.

What we find in these verses is a pattern of prophecy that is common in scripture.

A prophecy is given that has a dual-fulfillment.

And usually, the first and second fulfillments are separated in time by many years.

Like looking at two mountain peaks in the distance, one behind the other.

One is nearer, the other farther.

Both seem distant until you approach the closer.

You climb the side of the first peak and as you approach the summit you realize that the farther peak is still a long way off.

Yet climbing the nearer peak gives you a feel for what the farther peak is like.

So it is with much prophecy. There is a *nearer* and *farther* fulfillment.

Such is the case with these verses.

Antiochus was a brutal ruler who opposed God and elevated himself to the place of deity.

He gives us a picture of the last great human ruler who will rise to rule and who will elevate himself to the place of deity while opposing Christ at every turn.

In fact, he will try to pass himself off *as* Christ, that why he's given the title "Antichrist."

This chapter is critical because it gives us an historic pattern to look for in the emergence of the antichrist.

The angel tells Daniel that these things will take place in the last days, at the conclusion of history.

So as we study the life and career of Antiochus, we can gain insights into the plans and policies of the antichrist when he arrives.

Here are some of the things we can learn:

(1) He will achieve great power by *subduing others*. V. 24 . . .

His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power;

In other words, his power will come not because he has a right to it but because he usurps the power of others.

Just as Antiochus murdered his brother to gain the throne, the antichrist will gain his position by intrigue and manipulation.

We saw that in ch. 7 didn't we when his emergence deposes 3 of the previous 10 kings.

(2) He will rise to power by promising *false security*. That's what it means in v. 25 when we read . . .

"Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity.

While Antiochus was opposed by the vast majority of Jews, there was a small group who bought in to his attempts to reform the culture of Israel after the image of Greece.

This insignificant minority grew in time to become a fixture in Israel during the time of the Romans.

There ere many secular Jews living in Israel at the time of Christ who had no difficulty with Rome whatsoever, and saw the Romans as the logical heirs to the Greek Empire.

These Hellenistic Jews were always in the minority but they proved some of the first to come to faith in Christ in the early days of the church.

In Chapter 9, which we'll be studying to two-weeks form tonight, we read that in the last days, the platform that catapults the Antichrist to world attention seems to be a treaty he manages to garner many nations to sign that brings peace to the middle-east.

It's a treaty whose terms specify 7 years of peace and prosperity.

But he only uses this period of peace to foster his agenda of world

domination.

I find this point particularly interesting in light of the current elections and most recent presidential debates and their fallout.

Our current president is universally recognized as a man less than honest in his statements and representations.

In fact, this was pretty well known before his re-election in 1996.

But people were willing to overlook his reputation is a liar if it meant a continuation of their personal prosperity.

Now we have one of the candidates in exactly the same place.

He has been shown to be less than accurate in his remarks.

Yet the polls at times seem to indicate that the average voter is willing to overlook proven lies and deceit in favor of maintaining what seems to be a period of expansion and growth in the economy.

Truly the world political climate is being conditioned to accept a dynamic leader who people may KNOW is lying, but who makes grandiose promises about what he will do if only he is put into power.

(3) He will be *intelligent and persuasive*. Look at v. 23, the last phrase . . .

[He] understands sinister schemes.

Antiochus knew precisely what he was intending to do when he commanded the end to daily sacrifices, the end of the Sabbath law, and the desecration of the temple.

He knew it would either cow or inflame the Jews.

From the beginning, the Antichrist will know what he's after and he will have consummate skill at manipulating others to accomplish his ends.

To the public he will present one face, but he has ulterior motives that remain hidden but involve complex machinations that will all work together to spring a sinister trap.

(4) He will be an adversary of Israel and subjugate Israel to his authority as we read throughout this section.

(5) In v. 25, he will rise up in opposition to the Prince of princes, a title Daniel uses for Yahweh, but which also applies to Lord Jesus as the Prince of peace.

(6) His rule will be terminated by *divine judgment*. V. 25 ends . . .

. . . **he shall be broken without human means.**

Interesting that Antiochus died in Persia in 163 B.C. as a result of some kind of mental problem that drove him insane.

The Antichrist will be defeated in the Battle of Armageddon by the return of Christ.

Antiochus is the *first* fulfillment of this passage in amazing detail.

That first fulfillment in Antiochus makes the later fulfillment in the Antichrist even more certain.

What we see of Antiochus' career here as it depicts the last days career of the Antichrist is the *last half* of the Tribulation period, what is known as the *Great*

Tribulation.

This is where the mask is taken off the Antichrist and he is revealed for the *demon* he is.

Actually, the antichrist will be a man, possessed by Satan himself, as it says in Rev. 13.

For the first 3½ years of the Tribulation, the antichrist will simply be a man of amazing power and intelligence who seems to have answers for the problems that confront the world.

His promise of peace and prosperity are so appealing and he is such an astute political operative that the entire world is wooed by him.

But once he is firmly in the seat of power, he takes off the gloves and removes the mask and begins to make demands like Antiochus made of the Jews.

He will bring the daily sacrifices which have been restored in the rebuilt temple to an end.

And as Paul says in 2 Thess. 2, he will enter the Holy of Holies in the temple, declare himself God, and demand that the world worship him as such.

It's at this point that the Jews will collectively realize they have been cheated and this man many of them as accepted as their Messiah is nothing less than a demon.

They will demand his ouster, but by that time he will be too firmly entrenched in power to remove and will attack the Jews with fury.

As he then moves to expand his field of influence to a global sphere, the remaining nations of the world which have managed to elude his grasp will unite to attack him and his armies.

Their forces will meet in the Valley of Jezreel or as it is known Armageddon.

In the midst of the battle, Jesus Christ returns to earth, and the nations which have met there to fight against each other turn instead to resist the Coming Messiah.

But the battle is short and Jesus speaks the victory.

Antichrist and his assistant are captured, bound and thrown into the Lake of Fire.

And there you have a thumbnail sketch of the end of human history prior to the return of Christ.

Notice Daniel's reaction to the vision . . .

27 And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.

The sheer *scope* of the visions Daniel had been given overwhelmed him and he found his strength sapped.

Keep in mind that Daniel actually "saw" these things unfold before him.

The visual image was so intense it drained him.

It's possible that he also caught visual images of some of the things Antiochus and Antichrist would do and these would have been

staggering to a man like Daniel.

To see the altar covered in pig's blood and the antichrist killing thousands of Jews; this would stunned him.

No wonder he was sick for days.

He concludes by saying he was astonished by the vision and no one could understand it.

Even though the angel had told him what it meant, Daniel wasn't able to grasp how it would all play out in history.

Because part of this chapter has already been fulfilled so literally in history, it gives us a leg up on Daniel in terms of interpretation.

As we've already said, Antiochus gives us a picture of what the latter fulfillment will look like under the Antichrist.

CONCLUSION

We can be thankful that the Bible contains passages like this which give us an inkling of what last days events will be like.

The reasons God inspired such prophetic passages is so that you and I might be reminded that He is the Lord of History and Sovereign over the nations.

Even a ruler like Antiochus or the antichrist can only rise because ultimately God let's them.

And the end doesn't come because of the ruin and destruction the antichrist brings.

The end is the result of God's glorious victory in Christ.

Our destiny is not death but life.

The earth, while set to endure catastrophes the likes of which are unimaginable, will be restored to the place of paradise.

Satan's rebellion will finally and forever be put down, and creation will be free of the curse.