

“Kingdoms in Succession”

Daniel 8:1-27

In our study in the book of Daniel we’ve come to chapter eight. We learned earlier that the events of chapter 7 occur chronologically between chapters 4 and 5. This was in the first year of King Belshazzar’s reign. Daniel’s subsequent vision, here in chapter 8, occurs in the 3rd year of Belshazzar’s reign. So, that’s also in the interval between chapters 4 and 5.

As we noted earlier, the first half of the book of Daniel provides a general overview of human history, especially the “times of the Gentiles” and the relationship of Israel to world history, while the second half provides much more detailed explanations. We looked at some of those details in our study of chapter seven.

In Daniel chapter eight God pulls back the curtain of human history a little bit farther and gives us even more detailed information about His plans. Which leads to the question; “Why do we need all these details?”

First, and this is critical in our day, these details reassure us that God can predict the future with total accuracy and absolute certainty. And God wanted Israel and us to know that, ultimately, there will be a world ruler so powerful that he will try to usurp God’s position. In the New Testament, that ruler is called the Antichrist. The men and kingdoms in our text were prototypes, if you will, of that coming one who is called the man of sin or the son of perdition.

Second, I believe these revelations Daniel received provided hope and encouragement to the people of Israel in some of their darkest hours of suffering. And these details also help prepare us for what still lies ahead in the future. If we believe in the inspiration of Scripture, and its inerrancy, we can be confident that God knew we needed this portion of His divine revelation.

So, with that in mind we turn to the text, **Daniel 8:1-27**. That’s Daniel 8:1 to 27.

As we begin our study of chapter 8 there are several things to be aware of. First, the language in the original text switches from Aramaic to Hebrew. Why is that important? Because God is showing Daniel what will happen in the future especially as it relates to the people of Israel. While we’re looking at the succession of Gentile kingdoms, these kingdoms are set in the context of their impact on the Jewish people.

In Daniel's vision recorded in chapter 7 we saw the broad sweep of human history from Nebuchadnezzar to the end of time as we know it. In chapter 8 Daniel's vision is narrower, more focused on the Medo-Persian and Greek empires. Another difference between chapters 7 and 8 is in the way Daniel received these visions. In chapter 7 he has a dream containing the vision; in chapter 8 he is, apparently, awake as the vision begins to unfold.

We should also note the linkage between these two visions, especially the use of the "horns" as symbols of power. This symbolism was common in the ancient Near East. And, these horns are referred to numerous times in this chapter.

So, let's move now to our exploration of the text, looking first at...

The Kingdom of Medo-Persia

Daniel tells us in verse 1 that this vision was given to him after the previous one; the one in chapter 7. This one took place in the third year of Belshazzar's reign. In this vision he was transported from Babylon to Shushan. At the time Daniel was having this vision, Shushan or Susa, wasn't even under Babylonian control. But Daniel specifically mentions the city and a palace.

Susa is familiar to us because it was the place where Esther lived, and it was the city from which Nehemiah was sent back to Jerusalem. It became the governmental seat of the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel also mentions the river, Ulai. We learn from archeology that this most likely wasn't a river; it was a man-made canal connecting two other rivers in the area. Daniel finds himself projected into a future time and to a future site that would become an important capital in Persia.

These opening verses become the stage for the great drama that unfolds in Daniels' vision; the conquests of the second and third empires.

In verse 3 Daniel introduces the Medo-Persian kingdom as represented by a ram with two horns. John MacArthur states that the Hebrew text is emphatic in designating this single ram. Normally, sheep and goats come in flocks; this is a single ram. This kingdom corresponds to the breast of silver in the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream in chapter two, and the bear Daniel saw in his vision in chapter seven. And remember, the bear was raised up on one side, signifying that side was more powerful than the other side.

Now remember, horns symbolize power. Not only does this ram have two horns, which is normal, but they are big horns. This is a powerful animal. As Daniel watches, he notices that the one horn is higher than the other, but the higher one, or stronger one, came up last. And no one

can withstand the onslaught of this ram or deliver others from his power. In just 10 years, Cyrus the Persian conquered the then-known world; his progress was irresistible! And remember, God referred to Cyrus as “my shepherd” in Isaiah 44:28.

History tells us that the guardian spirit of the Persian kingdom was depicted as a ram with clean feet and sharp, pointed horns. When Persian kings went out to battle, they went before their troops carrying, not a crown of jewels like other kings, but an image of a ram’s head. And Persian soldiers often wore ram’s horns on their helmets.

This ram pushes toward the west, the north, and the south. Why doesn’t the ram push toward the east? Because the ram is coming from the east. The eastern border of the Persian Empire was near the modern-day country of India! In verse 20 of our text, Gabriel informs Daniel that the ram with two horns is the empire of the Medes and Persians. So, it makes sense that one horn represents Media and the other represents Persia.

Again, we know from history that the empire of Persia was newer than the empire of Media, but it eventually became the more prominent and powerful of the two. What Daniel’s vision pictures is an irresistible advancing Persian army, especially in the direction of Palestine, Asia Minor (that’s modern-day Turkey), and Egypt. Which leads us to the next kingdom...

The Kingdom of Greece

As the ram is advancing, Daniel sees another animal, a male goat, coming from the west and he covers the whole earth as he comes. This goat represents the third world empire and corresponds to the trunk and legs of brass in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream from chapter two, and the leopard with four wings from Daniel’s vision in chapter seven.

Daniel’s description of the goat includes a couple of unique things. The goat advances without appearing to touch the ground. This must signify the incredible speed of his advance. In addition, he has a notable horn, a very unusual horn, between his eyes. So, this is not a normal goat; he looks more like a unicorn!

As Daniel watches, this unusual goat charges the ram with the two horns with the full fury of his power. The KJV says the goat “*was moved with choler*” against the ram. Newer versions use the word, rage. The old English word, choler, is a reference to bile, a bitter fluid secreted by the liver. The apostle Paul said to Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:23, “*For I perceive that you are in the gall (bile) of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*”

So, this male goat is filled with uncontrollable rage! He charges the ram (representing the empire of the Medes and Persians) in all his fury. The goat's overpowering charge breaks the horns of the ram and he's left defenseless. He's unable to stand before this onslaught. The ram is overthrown and trampled under the feet of the goat. He comes to a violent end! There's nothing, or anyone, who could deliver the ram from the fury of the goat.

Now, we don't have to wonder about what this means because, again, Gabriel interprets for Daniel and for us. Gabriel says that the goat represents the kingdom of Greece. Most expositors identify the single horn as illustrating the dominant leadership of Alexander the Great. Part of the hatred and rage expressed in this text comes from the fact that the Persian Empire had previously attacked Greece. Both Darius and his son, Xerxes, had conquered some of the Greek city-states and made slaves of the occupants. Now, it was time for the Greek pay-back!

All this has been dramatically fulfilled in history. Alexander's lightning conquest of the Persian Empire is well documented. Beginning in May of 334 BC in Asia Minor, Alexander's forces moved rapidly to subdue the Persians and finally triumphed in October 331 BC. Because Daniel's prophecy is so detailed, liberal critics have claimed that Daniel was writing history instead of prophecy. But God has NO problem foretelling the future; He planned it and He controls it!

Verse eight describes how, after the goat became very powerful, his large horn was broken. Greece had barely reached the peak of its power when Alexander died. He was only 32 years old! Here was a type of the coming antichrist, a man possessed of brilliant intellect and consumed with demonic rage. He set up a power structure in Israel that established Greek rule and the worship of Greek gods. He set the stage for the "little horn" of verse nine.

A poet, Charles Ross Weede compared the life of Jesus and Alexander who both died at the age of 33. "Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three. / One lived and died for self, one died for you and me. / The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross. / One's life a triumph seemed, the other but a loss. / One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone; / One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own. / One won the world in life and lost it all in death. / The other lost His life to win the whole world's faith. / Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three. / One died in Babylon; and one at Calvary.

"One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave; / One conquered every tongue; the other every grave. / The one made himself god; the other made Himself less. / The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless. / When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords; / But Jesus died to

live forever Lord of Lords. / Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three. / The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.

“One built a throne on blood; the other built on love, / The one was born of earth; the other from above; / One won all this earth, to lose all earth and heaven. / The other gave up all, that all to Him be given.” / The Greek forever died; the Jew forever “lives.”

At Alexander’s death, his kingdom was divided into four parts by his army generals; but that division took 22 years of intrigue and treachery. If you want to know the names of the generals and the areas they controlled, you can find that in the secular history of the period. Let it suffice to say that Ptolemy was the general that took authority over the area that included Palestine.

So, you have the large horn broken, and four notable ones coming up in each direction of the compass. In verse nine, you have a little horn (a fifth one) springing out of one of the four. This little horn comes out of the Seleucid dynasty. This little horn represents Antiochus IV. Antiochus took the title Epiphanes which meant “God Manifest,” or, we might say, “God in the flesh.” So, he was literally claiming deity! The Jewish people called him “Epimanes” which means maniac. He was the eighth king of the Seleucid dynasty which ruled present day Syria, Iraq, and part of Turkey. But he wasn’t the rightful heir to the throne. He obtained it through flattery and bribery.

The text says that this little horn “grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious *Land*.” KJV says “beautiful land.” That’s Israel. He attacked Egypt, Armenia, and Elymais, and he forced on the Jewish nation unwelcome religious and civil policies. As Daniel watched, he saw this horn grow up to heaven and cast down some of the starry host and trample on them. What’s that about?

In Genesis 15:5 and 22:17 the descendants of Abraham are likened to the stars. I believe this means that Antiochus Epiphanes would persecute the Jewish people. And that is exactly what happened during the time of the Maccabees. He destroyed many copies of the Torah. He ordered the death of anyone who was caught with a copy. He commanded the Jewish people not to observe their feast days. He commanded them to offer unclean animals on their altar. If he found little boys who had been circumcised, he hung them up to die. He was ruthless!

But notice, this fellow isn’t finished yet. He magnifies 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. 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.*”

Now if Israel, the Jewish people, are the starry host, who then is the Prince of the host? It must be God. So, Antiochus will set himself up as God! Remember, his name, Epiphanes means “God manifest!” We know from history that he erected an altar to the Greek god in the Temple and ordered the Jewish people to worship Zeus. He also arrogantly went into the Temple and desecrated it by offering pig flesh on the altar. He assumed rights and prerogatives that belonged to God alone. When the Jews protested, he had vast numbers of them slaughtered!

The better wording in verse 11 is that *“from him, that is, from God, the daily sacrifices were taken away.”* The sacrifices God had prescribed for Israel were ended by Antiochus. And he was permitted to do it because of the transgression of God’s ancient, chosen, earthly people.

In addition, the angel said that *“the place of His [God’s] sanctuary was cast down.”* Antiochus didn’t destroy the Temple, but he polluted it horribly. When the Maccabees finally regained control of the sanctuary, they tore down the altar and built a new one. They also cleansed and rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple.

But notice, his despicable reign will only last for a specified time. The duration is clearly spelled out in the text. *“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?” And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”*

Two thousand three hundred days is about six and one-third years. We know that Antiochus persecuted the Jews between 171 and 165 BC. We also know Jewish worship was restored to the Temple on December 25th, 165 BC. This restoration event became the celebration of Hanukkah. It seems this prophecy was completely fulfilled in the reign of Antiochus. But from Daniel’s viewpoint, it was still in the distant future.

Isn’t it amazing that God revealed these details to Daniel? With God, the future is just as known and just as certain as history.

Understanding the Kingdoms

So, what are we to make of all this? Daniel is having this vision, and he’s wondering about what it all means (you would be too). And, all-of-a-sudden there’s this man standing in front of him! A voice begins speaking and Daniel hears these words; *“Gabriel, make this man understand*

the vision.” Someone was giving Gabriel instructions on what he was to do. Who has the authority to do that? God, Michael, the archangel? The text doesn’t tell us that.

Gabriel’s appearance is special. This is the first time he is identified in Scripture! He’s the messenger angel. He was sent by God to Zacharias, to tell him about the birth of John the Baptist. He was sent to Mary to give her the news that she would be the mother of Messiah, Jesus. Gabriel has a very important role in Scripture and in God’s service.

As soon as Gabriel comes near, Daniel falls on his face out of fear; it seems that he may have fainted. John had a similar experience in Revelation chapter one. It’s interesting that in this scene, Gabriel doesn’t address Daniel’s fear. Often in Scripture, when human beings come face-to-face with angels, they’re told not to fear, but not this time. He just touched Daniel and raised him to his feet.

I want to make sure you catch the first words Gabriel utters to Daniel. “*Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end.*” We might ask “the end of what?” Well, in verse 19 the term is expanded. Notice, “*I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation...*” It seems likely that these two references are made about the same event.

In his book, “The Most High God,” Renald Showers reminds us that the term indignation refers throughout Scripture to periods in Jewish history where God is angry with His people because of their rebellion against Him. As you recall, God used Gentile nations to chasten His wayward people, including Assyria, Babylon, and others. It appears the indignation began in the 730s BC with the Assyrians and will continue until the end of the Tribulation.

Note that Gabriel refers to *the time of the end, the latter time of the indignation*, and that it refers to *many days in the future*, verse 26. That seems to divide the time of indignation into two parts. The former is most likely what Daniel was living through in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. The latter time of indignation stretches from the end of the Babylonian captivity all the way to the return of Christ, the many days in the future.

Notice in verses 20 through 22 that Gabriel mentions the kingdoms as we’ve already identified them. The ram is Medo-Persia and the he-goat is Greece. He also mentions the great horn, Alexander, being broken and four horns coming in his place. We identified these kingdoms earlier in this teaching. Then, out of the four, one comes up from the Seleucid dynasty who is Antiochus Epiphanes.

Let's notice what Gabriel says next, and here there are some challenging things to understand. Bible scholars disagree on how to interpret this chapter, especially the second half of it. Some see the prophecy completely fulfilled in the person and times of Antiochus Epiphanes. Others say the entire chapter has a dual fulfilment. Some say that the first 14 verses have been historically fulfilled, I think we can agree on that. But they go on to say that the latter part of the chapter has a dual fulfilment; that is, a partial fulfilment in Antiochus, but also in the Antichrist who is yet to come. This is the view I personally find to make the most sense with other scriptures.

Verses 23 to 26 describe the characteristics of this individual who is pictured prophetically. First, he will appear "*in the latter time of their kingdom,*" that is, the four kingdoms of verse 22. Second, he will appear "*when the transgressors have reached their fulness.*" Next, he will be "a king "*with fierce features who understands sinister schemes.*" He will possess great power, but it will be power from an outside source.

He will be extraordinarily destructive in his exploits. In his power he destroys Israel and the mighty and holy people. Under his cunning leadership, deceptive policies will be proposed and advanced. Further, he will exalt himself; that's what Antiochus did. And by means of a false peace he will destroy many people. He will even revolt against the Prince of princes, yet in the end, he will be broken without human means. Antiochus did not die on the battlefield or at the hand of an assassin, instead, he died of a foul disease.

Now notice verse 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.*" Gabriel assures Daniel that the vision is true, but the understanding of the vision shall be delayed for many days – as well as its fulfilment.

In looking at these various elements of the vision we can see their historical fulfilment in the person and reign of Antiochus. But there are a couple of phrases that seem to suggest something beyond that time. One is "*in the latter time of their kingdom...*" Antiochus did arise in the latter time of the Syrian kingdom. A second statement is "*he shall stand up against the Prince of princes.*" This is most likely a reference to Jesus the Messiah, but he wouldn't appear on the world seen until more than 150 years later. However, Antiochus did stand against the God of Israel and the Messianic hope.

But the terms "*the end*" in verse 17 and "*the last end of the indignation*" in verse 19 are difficult to harmonize with the times of Antiochus. Walvoord says "These are hard to understand

as relating to Antiochus in view of the larger picture of Daniel chapter 7 which concludes with the second advent of Christ.” One writer points out that Antiochus did not live in the latter times of the old Grecian Empire; he died more than 100 years before it finally ended. His solution to this discrepancy is that the four kingdoms Daniel mentioned will have a “latter time.” That is, they will be represented territorially in the last days of the times of the Gentiles.

While there are many details here that fit the time of Antiochus, there are others that seem to clearly foreshadow a future person. That future person will embody many of the same characteristics of Antiochus, but his reign will be worldwide in scope. This future leader will also be “broken without human means” when he is defeated at the second coming of Jesus Christ. So, we have here a classic double-fulfillment of a prophetic portion of Scripture.

Gabriel made it very clear to Daniel the vision will not become immediately understandable to him and its fulfillment will take a long time in coming.

The result of Daniel’s vision - which must have been an informational and emotional overload - was, that he fainted. This was more than just a normal faint (if there is such a thing). He was sick for many days after this experience. Daniel was astonished at the vision, and no one, including himself, understood it. I can imagine him reliving this experience again and again trying to figure out what it meant.

Recall with me, that previously, Daniel was given understanding in dreams and visions, even to the point of interpretation. But here, he becomes the recorder only. It seems that the reason for the recording of this vision is for the benefit of future generations.

Looking back over this eighth chapter of Daniel reveals the emphasis on prophecy as it relates to Israel during the Times of the Gentiles. While this wasn’t and isn’t entirely a time of persecution of Israel, they have experienced great trials and suffering throughout the millennia. Of the four great world empires that Daniel saw in his visions, only Persia was relatively kind to the Jewish people. And Jesus Himself characterized the times of the Gentiles, in Luke 21, by the treading down of Jerusalem and the persecution of God’s ancient, chosen, earthly people.

You know, if this chapter tells us nothing else, it tells us God is absolutely in control of human history. He knows the end from the beginning. These world rulers that Daniel saw in his vision were allowed by God to serve in their positions. They thought they were in charge; they didn’t realize they were tools in His plan for human history. And they probably didn’t realize that they were also tools in Satan’s hand to try to usurp God’s rightful place and frustrate His plans.

It also shows us the incredible accuracy of God's Word, down to the smallest detail. God has a plan for human history, and a plan for each human life – including yours. You and I have two choices; we can discover and follow His plan, or, we can chart our own course through life. The one choice leads to eternal life, the other to eternal punishment; you must decide.

I know, there are people who scoff at this whole idea of Christ's second coming. There were people like that during the time the apostle Peter was writing his letters to the early church. He wrote "*...that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

The kingdom of Christ is coming; will you be a part of it?