

THE RAM AND GOAT

Daniel 8

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

In chapter 8 Daniel reveals what he saw in a vision during the third year of Belshazzar's co-regency with his father, Nabonidus (8:1). In the vision Daniel was transported to Shushan (Susa), the future capital of Medo-Persia (8:2). The vision was of a ram with two horns, one higher than the other, and the highest horn came up last. This is a clear representation of the Medo-Persian Empire. Horns represent power and the power of the Medes was overcome by the power of the Persians when Cyrus (the higher horn) conquered the Medes and then he joined the two empires. The vision of a male goat with a notable horn between its eyes represents the Grecian Empire and the notable horn representing Alexander the Great who led his armies to conquer Medo-Persia.

In the image dream (Dan 2), the Medo-Persian Empire was represented in the breast and arms of silver (2:32); in the beast vision (Dan 7), it was represented by a bear with one side higher than the other; and in this vision, it was the ram. The ram had one horn higher than the other, which was similar to the bear with one side higher than the other. This shows that the bear and the ram represent Medo-Persia. (7:5; 8:3). In the image dream, the Grecian Empire was represented in the belly and thighs of brass (2:32) and in the beast vision by a leopard with four wings (7:6). The swift goat that did not touch the ground and the swift leopard with four wings represent the Grecian Empire (7:6; 8:5). By comparing the visions in Daniel 2, 7 and 8, it gives us a progressive revelation of the Medo-Persian and Grecian Empires.

DANIEL'S VISION OF THE RAM AND THE MALE GOAT

I. Message of the Vision – 8:1-14

A. Introduction – 8:1-2

8:1 – Daniel's second vision occurred in Belshazzar's third year (551 B.C.), two years after his first vision of the four empires that were represented as beasts in chapter seven.

8:2 – In this vision, Daniel was mentally transported to Shushan (Susa) in the Elam province. Though an insignificant city at this time, Shushan was later to become the capital city of the Medo-Persians. Esther and Nehemiah later lived in the palace at Shushan (Esther 1:2; Neh. 1:1). The Ulai River (or "channel") was a man-made canal connecting two rivers. Daniel was probably transported to Susa for this vision because of the future relationship which this city would have to the Medo-Persians shown in verse three.

B. Ram—Medo-Persian Empire (539-331 B.C.) – 8:3-4

8:3 – Once again God employed the symbol of animals in a vision that He gave to Daniel. As Daniel looked toward the river, he saw a ram with two horns. This was an appropriate symbol to represent Medo-Persia, because these people believed a ram with sharp pointed horns was its guardian spirit. Also, the Persian king wore the head of a ram on his head when he stood before his army (Keil).

"Two horns" – they reflect the union of two nations in the Medo-Persian Empire. This dual aspect has been symbolized twice before to help the interpreter correctly identify this country (cf. 2:32; 7:5). When this is done, then one can accurately identify the other countries involved. The liberals ignore this duality of the Medo-Persian Empire because they want to make the Medes and Persians the second and third countries and the Grecians the fourth country. They claim that a pseudo Daniel wrote this book in the second century, because they deny the possibility of someone accurately predicting these events in the sixth century B.C., almost four hundred years earlier. They claim the prophecies written in this book were really historical events couched in the form of prophecy. However, Daniel not only wrote about events that happened four centuries later, but his prophecies also included events in the first century and events that have not yet been fulfilled.

“One was higher” – as the bear was raised on one side to show the dominance of the Persians over the Medes, so it is with the two horns on the ram.

“The higher came up last” – the Medes were a dominant political power before Cyrus the Great made the Persians strong enough to conquer his grandfather’s army and gain control of the Medians in 550 B.C. When he did this, he simply combined the two kingdoms to establish the Medo-Persian Empire.

8:4 – *“Pushing westward, northward, and southward”* – this relates to the three ribs in the bear’s mouth (cf 7:5). To the west, Cyrus conquered Lydia in 546 B.C. and then Babylonia in 539 B.C. To the south, Egypt fell to the Medo-Persian armies in 525 B.C. To the north, in the areas of the Black (Euxine), Caspian and Aral seas, it conquered the Scythians in 512 B.C.

“No beasts might stand before him” - indicated that no kingdom would withstand the Medo-Persians in their drive for power.

“He did according to his will, and became great” – indicated his self-will to achieve power (cf. 11:3, 16, 36). Medo-Persia was destined to become a great kingdom and continued from 550 B.C. to 323 B.C.

C. Goat—Greco-Macedonian Empire (331 – 63 B.C.) – 8:5-14

8:5 – As Daniel beheld the ram, a male goat came into view. This animal represents the Grecian Empire and it comes “from the west.”

“Touched not the ground” – symbolizes the rapid conquest of the world by Alexander the Great, just as the winged leopard pictured swiftness in Daniel’s previous vision (7:6). This is another help in identifying the kingdoms in chapter 7.

“Notable horn” – horns symbolize power, often political power. Here is a “notable horn,” which indicates great political power. This is Alexander the Great who adeptly led the Grecians to world-wide power.

8:6-7 – These verses obviously portray the stunning success of Alexander’s campaign against the Medo-Persian forces. Both horns of the ram were broken and the beast was thrashed beyond rescue.

8:8 – *“He-goat waxed very great”* – young Alexander became a world ruler, having led his forces from Greece to India in eight years, subjugating a large area of the world by the age of 32.

“When he was strong, the great horn was broken” – this symbolized the death of Alexander in the prime of his life.

“Came up four notable ones” – these notable horns refer to the four generals in Alexander’s army that ruled different parts of the Grecian Empire after Alexander died. They were Ptolemy, Seleucus (who conquered Antiochus), Cassander, Lysimachus (cf. notes on 7:6). Two of these, the Ptolemaic and the Seleucid kingdoms, alternated in ruling over Palestine.

8:9 – *“Out of one of them came forth a little horn”* – the symbolism of “a little horn” employed here is similar to the one in 7:8, but this “little horn” is different. Notice the contrast:

7:8
Roman horn
Comes up among ten other horns
Harasses Israel 1260 days

8:9
Grecian horn
Comes out of one of the four horns
Harasses Israel 2300 days

A little horn coming out of another horn in the Grecian Empire was a new revelation for Daniel. The revelation concerning Greece in chapter seven ended with the fourfold division (four heads on the leopard), but now a little horn is seen to rise out of one of these four divisions. This speaks historically of Antiochus Epiphanes (*An-TIE-oh-kus Ee-PIH-fa-nees*), who became a powerful leader of the line of the Seleucids and ruled in the area of Syria (175-164 B.C.). This prophecy was fulfilled about 400 years after Daniel gave it, but it foreshadows the life and deeds of Antichrist during the Tribulation. Antiochus Epiphanes promoted Greek culture in Palestine to the extent that his subordinates set up a statue of Jupiter in the Jewish temple and sacrificed swine on the altar while performing pagan ceremonies.

“Waxed exceeding great toward the south...east...pleasant land” – Antiochus, as he became more powerful, pressed south against Egypt, east against Armenia and Elymais, and into the “pleasant land,” i.e., Palestine. Daniel 8:10-14 expands on his actions against the Jews.

8:10 – *“Waxed great...to the host of heaven”* – not “to,” but “against the “host of heaven,” which refers to the righteous Jews, who also are called “stars” (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; Ex. 12:41; Dan. 12:3; Rev. 12:1).

“Cast down some” – the remainder of the verse refers to the great persecution which Antiochus brought on the Jews (cf. I Maccabbes chapter one).

8:11 – *“Magnified himself even to the prince of the host”* – Antiochus elevated himself above God, so that he made himself the only object of worship in Israel. The “prince of the host” is God.

“By him the daily sacrifice was taken away” – not “by,” but “from Him” (God) the daily sacrifice was taken away (cf 1 Mac 1:41-50). No doubt all sacrifices were taken away.

“Sanctuary was cast down” – he did not destroy the Temple, but desecrated it. It could not be used for worship until it was cleansed (1 Mac. 1:20-24). By these means Antiochus tried to show that he was God.

8:12 – *“Host was given him against the daily sacrifice”* – the “host” (people of God) were given over to the vile hand of Antiochus “against” (together with) the practice and place of Jewish worship.

“By reason of transgression” – God gave the practice, place and people of Jewish worship over to Antiochus so that he might chasten them for their sin and unfaithfulness.

“It (he) cast down the truth” – All true worship of God was deprived of its expression due to the tyranny of Antiochus.

“And it (he) practiced and prospered” – Antiochus succeeded only because God allowed him to do so that the Jews might be chastened.

8:13 – In his vision, Daniel then heard two saints (holy ones or angels) speaking. One asks a question, the other answers. The question simply concerned the length of time that God would give Antiochus to trample underfoot the Jews and their worship of God.

8:14 – The answer returned was that the sanctuary would not be cleansed for 2300 days (evening-mornings). This is confirmed as true by Gabriel in 8:26. The temple was cleansed by Judas Maccabeus on December, 164 B.C. (2 Mac. 10:1-8). Figuring back 2300 days, the beginning of desolation must have been in the fall of 171 B.C. Though no specific historical event marks this beginning date, it is about the time when the Jews began to rebel against the corruption in the priesthood and Antiochus thus began his great reprisals. December 25 or thereabout has been celebrated since that time by devout Jews to commemorate the cleansing of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus. This is the “feast of dedication” that was celebrated in the days of Jesus Christ (John 10:22). Today this celebration is called “Hanukkah,” a feast of lights.

Events in the Rule of Antiochus Epiphanes

175 BC – Antiochus begins his notorious reign.

174 BC – Jason bribes Antiochus to remove his godly brother (Onias) from being high priest and to give him that position.

171 BC – Menelaus gives a larger bribe to Antiochus so he can replace Jason as high priest. He sells

the gold utensils of the Temple to pay for his bribe.

171/170 BC – True Jews are stirred against the corruption in the government and in society.

168 BC – Antiochus begins a purge of Judaism and instills Hellenism in Israel.

167 BC – Antiochus desecrates the Temple on December 16 (Chislev 25).

164 BC – Judas Maccabeus cleanses the Temple on December 14 (Chislev 25).

II. Meaning of the Vision – 8:15-27

A. Introduction

8:15 – When the vision was ended, Daniel began to search for its meaning. Someone stood before him and appeared as a man. This seems to be Gabriel, who is introduced to him in the next verse.'

8:16 – Daniel hears a voice speak to Gabriel, no doubt the voice of God, which commands him to make the vision known to Daniel.

8:17 – When Gabriel approaches Daniel, he is afraid and falls on his face before him. Daniel is told by Gabriel that the main emphasis of the message involved “the time of the end.” “End” is found elsewhere in Daniel: 9:26; 11:6, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 6, 9, 13. It usually refers to the end of this age, “the times of the Gentiles,” after the Tribulation.

8:18 – Daniel literally faints (“was in a deep sleep”) as the angel speaks to him. Thus Gabriel touches him and causes him to stand up.

8:19 – Gabriel further explains the general interpretation of the vision. A more clear translation of verse 19 would be “...I will cause you to know what will be in the final period of the indignation because it concerns the appointed time of the end.” Both the “indignation” (cf. Is. 26:20) and the “end times” refer to the Tribulation period. As in v. 17, Gabriel points out to Daniel that the main thrust of the vision is “end time” in scope. The vision of the ram and the goat turns from a prophecy about the Grecian Empire to a prophecy about the Roman Empire during the still future time of the Tribulation.

“Indignation” – this refers to God’s indignation with Israel for their rebellion against Him. It began with Israel’s captivity by Assyria and continues throughout the times of the Gentiles until the Second Coming of Christ (Is. 10:5; Zech 1:12) – cf. R. E. Showers, (*The Most High God*, pp. 102-104).

B. Ram—Medo-Persian Empire (539 –331 B.C.) – 8:20

8:20 – Gabriel simply states that the ram represented the dual Medo-Persian Empire which was on the rise in Daniel’s day. Daniel is given this vision in 551 B.C. (8:1). Cyrus the Persian would subdue and join the Median kingdom with the Persian kingdom during the next year in 550 B.C. (cf. notes 8:3).

C. Goat—Greco-Macedonian Empire (331-63 B.C.) – 8:21-27

Then Gabriel interprets the goat as the kingdom of Greece and the great horn between its eyes as its first king, Alexander the Great (8:21-22). This explanation is followed by a reference to the “king of fierce countenance,” Antiochus Epiphanes, who would rule as a king from the Seleucid division of the Greek Empire about 150 years after Alexander died. What is said about him foreshadows the life and character of the coming Antichrist (8:23-25; cf 8:19). Then Gabriel confirms that the vision of the 2300 days is true, but it will not happen for many days – about 375 years after Daniel received this prophecy. This prophecy caused Daniel to faint and he was sick for many days before he could continue to do the king’s business. The vision astonished him, but no one could fully understand it – this no doubt has reference to the 2300 days, to the “king of fierce countenance” and to “the last end of the indignation.”

A CHART TO COMPARE THE VISIONS IN DANIEL

VISION	DANIEL 2 (603 B.C.)	DANIEL 7 (553 B.C.)	DANIEL 8 (551 B.C.)	DANIEL 9 (538 B.C.)	DANIEL 10-12 (536 B.C.)
BABYLON (605-539 B.C.)	GOLD head Symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar. Gold is king of metals.	LION + 2 eagle wings Wings plucked; stands on feet; given a man's heart (Neb's sickness, recovery, conversion)			
MEDO-PERSIA (639-323 B.C.)	SILVER breast / arms 2 arms (Medes and Persians) were united in breast (one empire)	BEAR – one shoulder is higher than the 2 nd -- two nations united to make one empire with Persia greater than the Medes.	RAM had two horns: one horn higher than the 2 nd (Persia was greater than Medes)		
GREECE (323-63 B.C.)	BRONZE belly/thighs Belly (one empire) 2 thighs (2 Greek kingdoms rule over Israel)	LEOPARD with four heads (4 kingdoms). Four wings (speedy conquest of M-P)	MALE GOAT has one horn = Alexander. Horn is broken = Alex death. 4 horns; a little horn comes from 1 of them.		
ANCIENT ROME (63 B.C.-A.D.476)	IRON legs 2 legs (Eastern and Western divisions of the Roman Empire.	FIERCE BEAST It was dreadful and strong. It had iron teeth.			
FUTURE ROME (Date ???)	IRON/ CLAY feet Has strength of iron, but weakness of clay. (Clay is brittle pottery)	TEN HORNS These are ten kings that reign at the same time. A little horn will arise in their midst.	The Greek little horn is like the Roman little horn in nature & in persecuting Israel, but he is more violent.		
MESSIANIC (After the fall future Rome)	STONE >>mountain Set up by God after Antichrist is judged. Christ rules the earth. His Kingdom is eternal	ANCIENT of DAYS gives the kingdom of David to the SON of MAN. This is when Tribulation begins.			

1. Historical Foretelling – 8:21-22

8:21 – The goat is specifically said to be Greece, a nation that was known, but relatively insignificant in Daniel's day; and the great horn is specifically the "first king" of the Grecian Empire, Alexander the Great.

8:22 – When the large horn is broken (Alexander's death), four kings would divide his kingdom, but none would measure up to Alexander's power and authority.

2. Prophetic Foreshadowing – 8:23-27

Many varied interpretations by honest Bible scholars have been given to this passage of Daniel. It is impossible to be dogmatic for only God understands all of the details involved in this prophecy. Yet, some evidences for a plausible interpretation will be given.

8:23 – "*In the latter time of their kingdom*" – refers to the later time of the Grecian Empire that has been divided by Alexander's four generals. Verses 23-26 find their historical referent in Antiochus who arose out of one of the four divisions of the Grecian Empire (see 11:21-35). However, Antiochus becomes a prototype of an eschatological "king of fierce countenance" (Antichrist) who also will establish an "abomination of desolation" in the Jerusalem Temple (compare 8:13 and 11:31, which involve Antiochus, with 9:27, 12:11 and Matt. 25:14, which involve Antichrist). Both will be allowed to persecute the Jews because of the Jews rebellion (Dan. 7:2 and 8:12). Antiochus ruled over the Seleucid empire from 175 B.C. to 164 B.C. and Antichrist will rule before and during the Tribulation.

When Antiochus ruled the Syrian part of Greece, Rome had begun a gradual conquest of Greece beginning with the fall of Macedonia in 168 B.C. and in 146 B.C. all of Greece was conquered.

"*When the transgressors are come to the full*" – this sets the time of the events mentioned in these verses. The "transgressors" are the Jews. God pours out His judgment upon the Jews when their sins surpass his longsuffering.

"Transgressors" – these are young, rich Jews.

- (1) They gave themselves to pleasure.
- (2) They questioned moral absolutes.
- (3) They undermined belief in the supernatural.
- (4) They were irritated by restraints of the Law.
- (5) They mocked priests of God and other Jews who worshipped God.
- (6) They made a covenant with the Greeks.
- (7) They built a pagan gymnasium in Jerusalem.
- (8) They left the covenant of God.
- (9) They practiced Greek customs.
- (10) They regarded themselves as Gentiles.
- (11) They worshipped Greek gods (1 Macc. 1:10-15, 43; 2 Macc. 4:7-17)

"*A king of fierce countenance*" – Some take this to be the Antichrist, however, it is probably best to view verses 23-27 as direct references to Antiochus who foreshadows the yet future Antichrist.

"*Understanding dark sentences*" – this same phrase is used in Aramaic (5:12) concerning Daniel's ability to solve involved and difficult problems. Antiochus was going to be an intelligent and capable leader.

8:24 – *“Power...mighty, but not by his own power”* – the political and military power of this king would be from Satan with God’s permission, for God will allow him to chasten the people of Israel.

“Shall destroy wonderfully” – he would cause vast, unique destruction to come upon his prey.

“Shall prosper and practice” – the action which he will employ (“practice”) would be very successful.

“Destroy the mighty and the holy people” – a reference to the Jewish people. Antiochus would be empowered by Satan to try to destroy all the Jews and thus prevent the Messiah from being the King of the Jews as God promised.

8:25 – *“His policy also...shall cause craft to prosper”* – literally “his wisdom” will cause “deceit” to prosper. His methods would be those of lies and duplicity.

“Magnify himself in his heart” – for he shall think himself capable of becoming not only the world ruler but deity incarnate.

“By peace shall destroy many” – literally “in security shall destroy....” Both Antiochus and the Antichrist ascend to power under the guise of peace (cp. 11:21 and 24 with 9:27).

“Also stand up against the Prince of princes” – The “Prince” is God; the “princes” are angels (cf. 10:13, 21; 12:1). Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords, which are similar terms. This evil king would not only be attacking Israel, but ultimately God. His desire is to dethrone God and make himself a god.

Shall be broken without hands” – This king would not die in conflict with a human army, but God Himself would take his life.

Antiochus tells us much about the character and rule of the Antichrist, which he prefigures.

- (1) He will have a “fierce countenance” – hard, stern face (8:23).
- (2) He will use his intelligence and craftiness to solve hard riddles and rise to power (8:23, 25).
- (3) He will have power “not by his own,” but will receive mighty power from Satan (8:24).
- (4) He will prosper by using Satan’s power with God’s permission to destroy others (8:24).
- (5) He will destroy many people of Israel (8:24).
- (6) He will magnify himself (8:25).
- (7) He will destroy many by offering peace (8:25).
- (8) He will oppose the “Prince of princes,” the God of angels, who is Christ (8:25)
- (9) He will be broken and destroyed without human help. Christ will destroy him with ease (8:25).

8:26 – *“And the vision of the evening and the morning...”* – is literally “now the vision of....” Gabriel is referring back to the vision of the 2300 evening-mornings of v. 14. He finally picks up the part of the vision concerning the desecration of the Temple (cf. vs. 11-14) and testifies that this desecration will last almost 6 ½ years. Up to this point, Gabriel had only been talking about the coming desolater not the desecration of the Temple. Lest Daniel think he had forgotten that portion of the vision, Gabriel mentions it here, but only to assure Daniel that it was “true” and it would happen. But as far as explaining the desecration or relating it to specific future events, Daniel was given no further information.

“Wherefore shut thou up the vision” – means “preserve the vision.” Daniel is to include nothing more concerning this portion of the vision. Apparently, God did not choose to disclose more information about the events of the 2300 days.

“For it shall be for many days” – literally “because it is with reference to many days.” The 2300 days are most likely in view here, and their exact significance as to its fulfillment was not going to be explained.

Commentators can only surmise the prophetic significance of these days, and are left nearly as mystified as Daniel was (v. 27)!

8:27 – Daniel again fainted (“was overcome”) and, due to this magnificent yet troubling vision, was sick for a number of days. No doubt the complexity and content of the revelation drained him both mentally and physically. Eventually his physical strength returned so that he could perform his duties, but his mind continued to be “astonished.” Even today, though we have more light on the subject, much of the “understanding” of this vision is beyond dogmatic explanations