

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.

Introduction:

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.

When Israel as a nation turned against God, in love He chastened them so they would return to Him. They were His people and He loved them as His children. He increased the chastening as they became more stubborn in their sin. He used Gentile nations to chasten them. He had them taken out of their land to endure suffering, sickness and even death. Some individuals repented, but the nation as a whole did not. When Israel rejected His Son as their Messiah, He scattered them into all parts of the world where many were severely persecuted. There is coming a time when Israel will add to their sin of rejecting Jesus as their Messiah; Israel will make a covenant with Antichrist, the enemy of God. They will trust the enemy of God for protection from their enemies when they refused to trust the Son of God for their salvation. This will be the height of their disrespect for God; the epitome of their apostasy from God (2 Th 2:3). As a result God will allow Antichrist to break his covenant with Israel and attempt to destroy her (Rev 12:17). But God will protect those in Israel that trust in Him. In the future the nation will turn from their sin and receive Jesus as their Messiah (Zech 12:10-14).

God also chastens Christians that sin against Him. They need to learn from Israel that God's chastening is not pleasant, but it is done in love to cause them to repent and confess their sins. Then He will forgive and restore them to fellowship with Him (Prov 28:13; 1 Jn 1:7, 9). However, not all suffering is caused by sin. God might allow problems to come into to cause believers to be more like Christ (Rom 8:28, 29). Trials may be used to increase a believer's fruitfulness (Jn 15:2), to test their maturity (1 Pet 5:10) or to teach them to fully rely on Him (1 Pet 1:7). Trials also keep believers from boasting (2 Cor 12:7).

The aim of the Lesson:

God chastens His children so He can restore fellowship with them.

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loves he chastens..." (Heb 12:5, 6).

Outline of the Lesson (Use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you.)

I. Marvels of Prophecy (8:1-27)

Fulfilled prophecy is proof that God knows the future; He controls all events to accomplish His good and perfect plan. His plan is good for those that love Him (Rom 8:28) and it rightfully glorifies Him. Daniel received several visions from God about future events; some were fulfilled in his lifetime, many of them were fulfilled hundreds of years later and some of them still await fulfillment during the Tribulation and during Christ's rule over the earth for 1000 years. Daniel received one of these visions in 551 BC during the third year of Belshazzar's reign over Babylon. It revealed some events that would begin to happen the next year and other events that would not be fulfilled for 375 years. In one sense, all of it will not be fulfilled until the Tribulation. It was a vision about a ram and a male goat that represented two kingdoms that followed the kingdom of Babylon: Medo-Persia (ram with two horns:

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one higher than the other) and Greece (male goat with one great horn that was broken off and four horns replaced it and then a little horn that came out of one of the four horns).

Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered his grandfather's kingdom of Media in 550 BC, one year after this vision was given to Daniel. Then Cyrus joined Media with Persia to form the Medo-Persian Empire. Eleven years later his armies conquered Babylon in 539 BC while Daniel was still alive. Medo-Persia conquered many countries and was a world power for more than 200 years. Then Alexander the Great rapidly conquered Medo-Persia in less than ten years (331-323 BC). This made Greece a world power (represented by the male goat). Alexander (the great horn on the goat) completely conquered the vast territory of Medo-Persia, almost 230 years after Daniel's prophecy (8:5-8, 21). Alexander, however, died suddenly in 323 BC and four of his generals (four horns on the goat) divided among themselves the territory that Alexander had conquered (8:8, 22). God allowed two of these four territories to trample over Israel for 160 years as they fought against each other (Syria to the north of Israel and Egypt to the south). God allowed this to happen to chasten Israel for their refusal to obey Him. Then out of Syria came a small horn that represented Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC). This Syrian king was the most wicked of all the kings of Syria. In his last 2300 days of power, he attempted to corrupt Israel with Grecian idols and he killed many of those that would not conform (he is a type of the coming Antichrist). God showed mercy to Israel and let the Maccabees drive Antiochus Epiphanes out of Israel and he died a broken man soon afterward (8:9-14, 23-25).

We can learn from Daniel's prophecies that God's Word is true. We must learn to live by it. This will show our love for Him (Jn 14:21, 23). If we do not obey His Word, He will chasten us so we will turn from our sin.

II. Means of Chastening (8:9, 10)

Daniel prophesied that God would allow a Grecian king to cast down to the ground the host of heaven and the stars, which refers to His people, the Jews. This king was Antiochus Epiphanes, who would stomp on them, putting many of them to death. The book of Judges adequately depicts how God used a variety of nations to chasten Israel for departing from Him until she repented and returned to Him. Antiochus Epiphanes' treatment of the Jews foreshadows a greater persecutor of the Jews in the future. God will let Antichrist try to kill every Israelite during the Tribulation until she finally repents. Then Christ will come to save her.

We may be chastened by unregenerate men or by secondary causes, like sickness or hardships, which God may use to cause us to repent and restore our fellowship with Him. God has a reason and an ultimate plan behind every trial we receive; it is for our good and for His glory.

III. Method of Chastening (8:11, 12, 23-25)

Daniel's prophecy revealed God's method was to allow Antiochus to magnify himself, even to claim that he was their god. He cast the Scriptures to the ground to keep the truth from the Jews; he deprived the Jews of their daily sacrifice to God and it is said he offered a sow on God's altar; he desecrated their place of worship with his false gods and corrupt priests; and he destroyed many of the Jews because they despised him. God allowed this until Israel's transgression was full (8:23). This chastening was designed to make them miserable in their sins; their sins had separated them from God. Chastening is God's method to bring Israel back into fellowship with Him.

If we are out of fellowship with God, our prayers are no longer answered. It is not God's fault; it is ours (cf. Dt 28:15ff; esp. v. 23a). He may step into the shadows until we really want to be close to Him again. He will chasten us to make us desire to come back to Him for His comfort and fellowship.

IV. Merit of Chastening (8:14, 25)

God showed mercy to Israel and stopped the chastening when she repented. The harsh treatment by Antiochus caused the Maccabees to fight against Antiochus until they drove him out of Israel. Then after 2300 days under the devilish treatment of Antiochus, they cleansed the Temple so they could once more worship God (8:14). Antiochus was broken and died at the hand of God of some disease or of a broken heart in Babylon. (8:25). God was able to restore fellowship with Israel. This was the merit of God's chastening.

If we repent and turn from our sins, God will forgive us and deliver us from our sins (1 Jn 1:9; Prov 28:13). There is no sin that a true cannot conquer (1 Cor 10:13). If we cannot conquer sin in our lives, we need to be concerned about our salvation. We conquer sin by the same power that saved us.

LET GOD'S CHASTENING HAND DRAW YOU CLOSER TO HIM.

[NOTICE: There is a chart you can download on the prophecies God gave to Daniel in the first three visions. The students have a blank chart and will need your help to fill in the most important facts, which are underlined in your chart.]