

THE RAM AND THE GOAT

Theme: God gives a vision of the suffering of his people under the reigns of the Media-Persian and Greek world empires.

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Chapter eight contains a second vision, given directly to Daniel, concerning the times of the Gentiles. It is also a third of the parallel visions concerning the careers of the four great world empires (the first being given in chapter two, concerning the dream that Nebuchadnezzar has of the great image; and the second being given in chapter seven, concerning the dream that was given to Daniel concerning the four beasts). Daniel's vision in chapter eight gives expanded details concerning the first two of the four beasts described in chapter seven.

An important change of focus is indicated in the original language of Daniel's book. From 1:1-2:3, the language was Hebrew--the language of the captive people. From 2:4 to the end of chapter seven, however, the language was Aramaic--the common language used by the people of Chaldea, and the common world language of the day. This suggests that the message of chapters 2-7 is intended to be heard by not only the people of Israel, but all peoples of the Gentile kingdom as well. But now, with chapter eight, the original language returns again to Hebrew--and remains so to the close of the book. This suggests that the focus is now, specifically, on Israel. God is here letting His captive people know what their future is.

Another important feature of chapter eight is the prophetic time in view. Throughout this chapter, the immediate future events concerning Media-Persia and Greece are what is in focus. But beginning with verse 23, the details clearly present a type of the rise of a particular world ruler in the end times. Thus, the eighth chapter of Daniel offers a 'telescopic' view of prophetic events in the future--dealing both with 'soon-coming' future events and 'far-distant' future events at the same time.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF THE VISION (vv. 1-2).

The vision was given during the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar (v. 1). This means that this vision was given two years after the vision of chapter seven (7:1). And it also means that the details of this vision concern two world empires that had not--at the time it was given--yet risen to dominance. Daniel affirms that he was the recipient of this vision--giving particular emphasis to the fact that the vision appeared "to me--to me, Daniel--after the one that appeared to me the first time" (v. 1). This could emphasize that Daniel's knowledge of this vision was first-hand; or it could speak of the honor that Daniel felt in having received it. But it could also emphasize the continuity this vision bears to the vision that had preceded it.

While the previous vision was given through a dream, there is no indication that this second vision was given in that way. Daniel says that he was looking while the vision was being given; and that he suddenly found himself in a completely different location in the vision. Specifically, he was in Shushan (or Susa--about 250 miles east of Babylon), in the citadel (that is, the fortress). This would later become one of the capital cities of the Media-Persian empire (Nehemiah 1:1; Esther 1:2). God was thus taking Daniel to the location of the events being depicted in the vision. He stood by the River Ulai--a central point in this location; and was therefore brought into the main center of future events.

II. THE CONTENT OF THE VISION (vv. 3-14).

Daniel lifted his eyes and first saw a ram which had two horns (vv. 3-4). Later, we are made to understand that this was a picture of the Media-Persian empire (v. 20). It had two horns--one representing

Media, and the other Persia. Both horns were high; but one grew higher than the other and came up last; since Persia later gained greater dominance over the empire. This “ram” pushed into the general directions of its conquest--westward, northward and southward (note that it didn't push eastward). None could withstand the expansion of the mighty Media-Persian empire.

While Daniel considered this ram, another beast came onto the scene--a male goat, coming from the west; whom we are told later is Greece (v. 21). This is a remarkable goat--a 'unicorn' goat; having only one prominent horn. This horn, we're told, is “the first king” of the Grecian empire (v. 21); that is, Alexander the Great. The goat is described as coming upon the ram with great fierceness and speed; and completely trampling the ram. The two great horns of the Media-Persian empire were broken by Alexander. (The rage with which Greece conquered Media-Persia may have been inspired by the conquest Media-Persia had made against Greece years prior.)

Alexander was suddenly cut off--having died suddenly at the age of 32 in the year 331 BC. In his place, four horns grew (which represent the four generals who assumed his rule after his death: Cassander to the west, Lysimachus to the east, Ptolemy to the south, and Seleucus to the north—see v. 8). Out of one of these four came a little horn which grew exceedingly great. We're made to know who this is by the fact that it grew “toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land (that is, Palestine to the west). This means that the horn is from the north. It refers to the eighth king of the Seleucid dynasty; that is Antiochus Epiphenes, who came to the throne in 175 B.C. His career is one of dreadful destruction of the Jewish people. He grew to the host of heaven and cast down some of the stars (a description of his abuse of the Jewish leaders--see v. 10). He even exalted himself against the God of Israel, and eliminated the daily sacrifices and defiled the temple (vv. 11-12). The time of his oppression was limited, however, to 2,300 days (vv. 13-14). His reign of terror begin in 171 BC, and ended on December 25, 165 BC through the revolt of the Maccabees--at which point, the temple sacrifices were restored.

III. THE EXPLANATION OF THE VISION (vv. 15-25).

Daniel was seeking the meaning of these things; and was given an authoritative explanation by the angel Gabriel (see Luke 1). Daniel was overwhelmed by the vision of Gabriel; but is strengthened in order to be given the interpretation. He is told that these things relate to the kingdoms of Media-Persia and Greece. But he is also told that they concern things that pertain to the “end” that is appointed at a certain time (v. 19; see also v. 26). These things parallel the events also spoken of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 12-13. Antiochus Epiphenes is a type of the coming Antichrist--whose cruelty toward the Jews and prideful defiance of God will far exceed that of Antiochus.

IV. THE AFFIRMATION OF THE VISION (v. 26).

Daniel is told that these things are “true”. They are reliable and can be counted on to occur as foretold. And what's more, the people of Israel can place their confidence in the unfolding of God's plan. Daniel and is also called upon to “seal up” the vision. This refers to the fact that it has a future fulfillment and is to be kept unto that time. (Note that, in Revelation 22:10, John is told, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.”)

V. THE RESPONSE TO THE VISION (v. 27).

Daniel responds by being sick “for days”. It was a vision that was exhausting. He went back to service to the king; but kept these things, and was astonished by them. No one understood it.

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What a stunning prophecy! Because we live historically on the 'fulfillment' side of these promises, we should do as God has said: "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My council shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure . . .'" (Isaiah 46:9-10.)