

Daniel 8 • Visions for the Future – Part 2

Introduction

Whereas Daniel's vision in the last chapter provided details of the four earthly kingdoms to come with an added emphasis on the final one, this second vision focuses on the two middle empires assigned to the Medo-Persians and the Greeks. What God is doing is narrowing the focus. Chapter 7 is a kind of view of the whole world, chapter 8 narrows the focus to how the world will specifically interact with Israel, and we will see in chapter 11 how God narrows the focus even further. Whereas we learn of the general spiritual forces influencing all of world affairs, here they are more acutely refined to show those spiritual forces at work against God's people specifically and the true desire of Satan to be worshiped in place of the One True God. Once again events on earth will reflect what is going on in the spiritual realm.

¹In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously.

[Read v.1]

Q: When does this vision occur within the overall book of Daniel?

A: Chronologically the visions of Daniel 7 and 8 actually took place **before** the events of Daniel 5 (the writing on the wall). This vision comes 2 years after that experienced in the last chapter.

Q: If we were reading Daniel in the original biblical languages, what would be particularly significant about Daniel 8?

A: Everything from Daniel 2:4 until Daniel 7:28 is written in Aramaic, probably a reinforcement of those chapters' relevance to the Gentile nations of the world. Beginning with Daniel 8 the rest of the book is written in Hebrew, probably attesting to its relevance to Israel.

²I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal. ³Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. ⁴I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

[Read v.2-4]

Q: What is significant about the place to which Daniel finds himself?

A: It is the capital of Persia, the stronger half of the Medo-Persian Empire which is slated to next come into power and end the current reign of Babylon.

Q: How do we know for sure that the ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire?

A: Because it plainly states in v.20, "The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia".

Q: What is historically significant about this empire being represented by a ram?

A: This was the actual, royal emblem of the empire much like the winged lion was a literal emblem of the Babylonians. God chose an emblem to speak of future events which was actually employed by that kingdom when it came to power.

Q: Why is one horn "longer than the other, with the longer come coming up last"?

A: Each horn symbolizes the two halves of the Medes and Persians forming this alliance with the Persians being stronger.

Q: Why is no mention made of the ram's eastward accomplishments?

A: Because it is standing in and comes from the East. This accurately describes the empire's origination point and overall thrust of expansion.

⁵While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. ⁶He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. ⁷I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. ⁸Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

[Read v.5-8]

Q: How do we know for sure that the goat represents the Greek Empire?

A: Because it plainly states in v.21, “*The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king*”.

Q: How does the position of the goat reflect what we know about the Greek Empire?

A: Like the goat it originated and came from the West in the opposite direction of the ram.

Q: What is historically significant about this empire being represented by a goat?

A: The goat was the symbol of the armies of this empire found on its ensigns. God again uses a symbol which parallels real life.

Q: What does the goat’s “conspicuous horn between his eyes” represent?

A: Alexander the Great who attacked and overthrew the Medo-Persian Empire in a very short time by ancient standards.

Q: Why is the goat described as travelling “the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground”?

A: It is an expression signifying that its accomplishments are achieved so quickly that it would appear to be flying. Historically this precisely matches the character of Alexander the Great’s achievements having conquered the known world in only 6-8 years, incredibly fast for the ancient world.

Q: How did Alexander fulfill the scriptural portrayal that he “magnified himself exceedingly”?

A: He began to refer to himself as “Zeus-Ammon”, a way of claiming to be the son of the Greek God Zeus. He also instituted the practice of “proskynesis” which literally means “kissing towards”, the act of people prostrating themselves before him. Even in the Greek culture of the day to do this to a mortal was considered a barbarian and ludicrous practice and something reserved strictly for the worship of the gods. This caused much division and strife even among his own people because it was an act of self-deification.

Q: How was “the large horn” broken historically?

A: Alexander the Great was still quite young when he died after having conquered the known world.

Q: Why do four horns rise in the place of the lone large horn?

A: When Alexander died his kingdom was split into four parts and each ruled separately by former generals under his command. These correspond to Macedonia ruled by Antipater, Egypt ruled by Ptolemy, Syria ruled by Seleucus, and Asia ruled by Antigonus. This mirrors the vision of the leopard with four heads in Daniel 7:6. God will focus in particular on the activities of the two empires of Egypt and Syria in Daniel 11.

⁹Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. ¹⁰It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. ¹¹It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. ¹²And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper. ¹³Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, “How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?” ¹⁴He said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored.”

¹⁵When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man. ¹⁶And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said, “Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision.” ¹⁷So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, “Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end.”

[Read v.9-17]

Q: When were we first introduced to the concept of a small horn?

A: In Daniel 7:8 as representing the person of the Antichrist.

Q: Why might the descriptions about these two little horns indicate that they are not referring to the exact, same person?

A: Whereas the little horn in Daniel 7 rises as the ruler of a final worldwide empire, the little horn mentioned here rises from one of the four divisions of Alexander’s kingdom. However, it is obvious that this little horn has a very strong connection with the Antichrist.

Q: Why might it be possible for them BOTH to represent the final person of the Antichrist?

A: A careful reading of Revelation 13 indicates that what we might term the final person of the Antichrist is actually two people referred to separately as the Beast and the False Prophet. It is possible that Daniel is ascribing in chapters 7 and 8 characteristics to each of these two different personalities. This might indicate that the two personalities of the Antichrist rise from two different backgrounds but work towards the same goals.

...Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names...Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

— Revelation 13:1, 11–12

Q: What are the activities associated with the little horn?

1. (v.10) “It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down.”
2. (v.11) “It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host...”
3. (v.11) “...it removed the regular sacrifice from Him...”
4. (v.11) “...the place of His sanctuary was thrown down.”
5. (v.12) “On account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice...”
6. (v.12) “...it will fling truth to the ground...”
7. (v.12) “...it will...perform its will and prosper.”

Point: *The work of the Antichrist is to not just attack the Jews politically but also religiously in an effort to destroy their faith. He literally takes over the things of God setting himself up to be worshiped in God’s place. These things combine to provide a picture of what we call “The Abomination of Desolation”.*

Q: How were many of these things literally fulfilled historically?

A: During the Intertestamental period Antiochus Epiphanes IV, a wicked leader arising out of the branch of Alexander’s empire called Syria invaded Israel, ordered an end to the way Jews were allowed to practice their faith, and set up an statue to Jupiter in the Temple with his own face on it. He even went so far as to sacrifice a pig on the altar and sprinkle its blood about the courts thus desecrating it. The Temple lay desolate until

Dec. 25, 165 BC when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the Temple and cleansed it, the historical record documenting the total number of days between desecration and dedication as 2,300!

Q: So how do we know that this wasn't the sole and complete fulfillment of this prophecy?

A: Jesus, with full knowledge of what had taken place nearly 200 years earlier, quotes Daniel stating that this Abomination of Desolation will happen yet again. (Mt. 24:15) Very similar things will occur again during the course of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. These things each bring about a partial fulfillment of prophecy establishing a pattern teaching something about the final, complete fulfillment to come in the end through the Antichrist. This is plainly confirmed in Daniel 8:17, "Understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end".

[Read v.18-26]

Note: Thus v.18-22 provide the plain, unambiguous meaning of what the main elements of the vision represent.

Q: What are the additional characteristics which will identify the Antichrist?

1. "A king...insolent and skilled in intrigue." (v.23)
2. "His power will be mighty, but not by his own power..." (v.24)
3. "...he will destroy to an extraordinary degree..." (v.24)
4. "...he will...prosper and perform his will..." (v.24)
5. "He will destroy mighty men and the holy people." (v.24)
6. "...through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence..." (v.25)
7. "...he will magnify himself in his heart..." (v.25)
8. "...he will destroy many while they are at ease." (v.25)
9. "He will even oppose the Prince of princes..." (v.25)
10. "...he will be broken without human agency." (v.25)

Q: What does it mean that the Antichrist "will be broken without human agency"?

A: In other words God will not raise an earthly force to directly confront and defeat him, but will engage and defeat him personally. We commonly refer to this as the Battle of Armageddon.

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

— Revelation 19:19–21

Q: Does v.26 indicate the meaning of these things will never be understood?

A: The language used here is basically stating that the meaning of these things is to be sealed until the very Last Days when their meaning will become clear. It is a compliment to what John was instructed in Revelation 22:10, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near". It is God's intention that everything be plainly

¹⁸Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright. ¹⁹He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end. ²⁰The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. ²²The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power.

²³"In the latter period of their rule, When the transgressors have run their course,

A king will arise,
Insolent and skilled in intrigue.

²⁴His power will be mighty, but not by his own power,
And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree

And prosper and perform his will;
He will destroy mighty men and the holy people.

²⁵And through his shrewdness
He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence;

And he will magnify himself in his heart,
And he will destroy many while they are at ease.

He will even oppose the Prince of princes,
But he will be broken without human agency.

²⁶The vision of the evenings and mornings

Which has been told is true;
But keep the vision secret,

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For it pertains to many days in the future

²⁷Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.

revealed in the shadow of the Last Days when these things come to final fulfillment.

[Read v.27]

Observation: *Why is it that biblical accounts of people having true encounters with God are nearly opposite of the reactions and accounts of false prophets and false teachers?*

Overall Application

God here narrows the focus from the whole world in general to specifically how it will interact with Israel in the Last Days. We see many of these things occurring today in the Middle East, but not all of them; we have seen many types of Antichrist throughout history but not the ultimate, final one. Within Daniel 7 and 8 we are provided with a basic foundation not just for the elementary structure of the End Times but the greater spiritual forces behind it, particularly through the Antichrist and his personal battle against Christ. It is not enough that "most" of these things come true – that has been the case for previous, partial fulfillments teaching of the final one to come. What we must be most acutely attuned to is seeing each and every aspect fully and unambiguously fulfilled according to the plain teaching of Scripture.