

## **Series Daniel**

### **Scripture Daniel 8**

It is helpful to have a history book open alongside the book written by Daniel, because what Daniel prophesied became, and continues to become, fulfilled historical fact. This should not surprise us since it was God Who revealed the future to Daniel.

The vision we will focus on today must be integrated into the visions we have previously thought about. Remember that there are four earthly kingdoms which will be followed by an eternal kingdom. Daniel chapter 2 focused on the first and fourth earthly kingdoms, and the eternal kingdom. There was very little attention given to the second and third kingdoms in chapter 2. Daniel chapter 7 focused on the fourth and eternal kingdoms, and there was very little information about the first three. The vision in chapter 8 only gives details concerning the second and third world empires. By taking all three visions together we can begin to get a composite picture of what is happening in human history from God's perspective.

One of the significant facts about chapter 8 is that its original language shifted from Aramaic to Hebrew. There was a reason for this. Aramaic was the common language used throughout Babylonia, and the messages of chapters 2-7 were intended for all the peoples of the Babylonian empire, Gentiles as well as the Jewish exiles. The testimonies of Nebuchadnezzar, for example, were directed to all the people in his realm.

Beginning with chapter 8, Daniel's messages were specifically directed to his fellow Jews. The information in the visions included warnings and encouragements that were applicable only to the Israelites. God wanted His people to know about the course of events associated with the "times of the Gentiles." By means of the visions, God was informing His people about their future.

Let me make some general comments about prophecy. Prophecy is given to people in order to get them to change their perspective — first, to help them to see things as God sees them rather than as conditions appear to the human eye, and, secondly, the purpose of prophecy is to encourage people to change their behavior if it is out of line with what God expects. Throughout the Old Testament, God sent prophets to warn His people of approaching judgment. Chapter 8 of Daniel is an example of this. The people of God, which includes us, are never to base their thinking and actions on their perceptions of circumstances, but upon what God has said in the Scriptures. What God says, He will do. History has shown this to be true in the past, and prophecy assures us that it will be true in the future.

The prophecies of Daniel chapters 7 through 12 had a specific message for the Jews, but there are also some New Testament instructions for us. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote: “Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. ... Since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation (*I Thessalonians 5:1-8*).

With that introductory information in mind, let’s read chapter 8

### **Read Daniel 8:1-27**

This vision was given to Daniel in the third year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. This would be 12 years before the capture of Babylon by the Medo-Persian army. Daniel would have been about 70 years old.

It is unclear from the text whether Daniel was physically in the citadel of Susa or whether he became aware that this was the setting of the vision. Susa is one of the oldest cities in the world. It was located about 230 miles east of Babylon, between two rivers, and it was, and continues to be, at the center of a very fertile agricultural area. At the time of Daniel’s vision, the city was in disrepair, having been completely destroyed by the Assyrian army 100 years previously. However, about 50 years after Daniel’s vision, it would be declared a royal city, the capitol of the Persian empire.

A number of Persian kings lived in and built impressive buildings in the city. As a result, it became the most important city in the Ancient Near East for several decades. *[FYI, the events in the book of Esther took place in Susa about 80 years after Daniel had this vision. Esther was the queen of Xerxes, who ruled over the Persian kingdom when it was at the height of its prominence. Nehemiah, before he became the supervisor for the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem, had been the cup bearer to another Persian king (Artaxerxes) in Susa.]*

In the vision, Daniel was placed at the political center of the Medo-Persian empire because he was intended to see what would happen to that kingdom. Verse 20 explains that the ram represented “the kings of Media and Persia.” According to verse 4, the Medo-Persian empire “charged toward the west and the north and the south.” These were the directions in which Cyrus and the kings who followed him had successful military conquests. Babylonia, Syria, and Asia Minor were to the west. Later expansion was to the north into Armenia, and the region around the Caspian Sea. Later expansion of the Persian empire was southward into Egypt and Ethiopia. The armies of the Medo-Persians overran opposing forces with comparative ease for more than 50 years.

Their only failures were against the Greeks in the far northwest. Skirmishes against the Greek city/states began with Cyrus but became very serious major battles when other Persian kings sought to advance into Europe.

And that explains why the “he-goat” “charged at the ram in a great rage.” The one-horned he-goat “came from the west.” In verse 21 the goat is identified with Greece. According to verse 5, the goat moved across the earth “without touching the ground,” an indication of great speed. In chapter 7, the symbol of the Grecian empire was a leopard with wings, another reference to speed. This was a perfect picture of Alexander the Great, who succeeded his father as king at age 20, and began his military conquests in his 21<sup>st</sup> year.

Alexander’s first goal was to destroy the Persian empire, and he was incredibly successful in his efforts. Although his forces were greatly outnumbered, Alexander’s military defeated the Persians in three major battles in three years. The Persians were not only defeated in humiliating fashion on these occasions, but their major cities, including Susa, were sacked, and all Persian territory was lost. Greece became the dominate world power.

Alexander then marched across present day Afghanistan, then turned south into India before he gave up on his ambitions. By the time he was 30 years old, he was depressed because there were no more kingdoms to conquer.

On his way back to Greece, at the height of his power, he died in his 33<sup>rd</sup> year. After his death, there was some effort made to hold the Greek empire together, but within 20 years, all the territories conquered by Alexander were divided between four of his generals, hence the reference to the four horns which grew up in place of the one which was broken off.

Let's keep in mind that Daniel received this vision more than 200 years before the events occurred (*551 to 336 BC*).

Verses 3 through 8 are background for the more significant information in verses 9 through 14, where we read that a small horn emerged from one of the four horns. There are more verses devoted to the description of this little horn than to the overall history of the Persian and Greek empires. The focus of chapter 8 is on this "little horn," which "grew until ... it set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host," that is, God Himself.

Verses 9 through 12 describe conflict between this "horn" and God and the people of God. It was predicted that the "horn" would prevent the Jews from worshipping God by "removing the regular sacrifice" and throwing down "the place of His (God's) sanctuary," and that "truth would be thrown to the ground." The "horn" would "throw some of the starry host down to the earth and trample on them." In the context, "the host" is a reference to the Jewish people.

Historians identify this "horn" with Antiochus Epiphanes. He was the eighth ruler over one of the four divisions of the Greek empire. He ruled over territory which included Palestine, referred to in verse 9 as "the Beautiful Land." [*He reigned from 175 to 164 BC.*] He made a determined effort to destroy the Jewish faith. He forbid religious activities on the Sabbath and the daily burnt offerings in the temple. In fact, he desecrated the temple by erecting in it an idol to the Greek god Zeus and by sacrificing swine on the altar. He had the scrolls of the Old Testament scriptures burned, and forbid the circumcision of Jewish male babies. On one occasion, his military forces killed 40 thousand Jews in Jerusalem in three days, with about 40 thousand others taken into captivity.

Antiochus tried to make the Jews into Greek citizens, to get them to change their culture and ways of religious thinking. Many of the Jews resisted his efforts and they were made to suffer for it.

I said earlier that prophecy was given for specific reasons: “Prophecy is given to people in order to get them to change their perspective — first, to help them to see things as God sees them rather than as they appear to the human eye, and, secondly, to encourage the people of God to change their behavior if it is out of line with what God expects.”

The prophecy concerning the behavior of Antiochus Epiphanes is a perfect example of how God works out His purposes. In verse 12 we read: “Because of rebellion, the host of the saints ... were given over to the ‘horn.’” This verse refers to the rebellion of the Jewish people. Because of their unrighteous behavior, they were “given over” by God to Antiochus, who became God’s agent to punish the chosen people.

There is another clue as to the reason for the persecution in verse 23, which states: “When rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king ... will arise.” Also note in verse 24, “He (the stern-faced ruler) will become very strong, but not by his own power.” The point here is that God was taking action against the increasing wickedness of His people. God’s wrath was poured out on His sinful people through Antiochus.

This was a pattern used by our sovereign God several times in human history. Let me give some examples. In the time of the Judges, God brought judgment on the tribes of Israel through neighboring people groups. There were cycles of wickedness and oppression, followed by repentance and restoration, then increasing wickedness and falling away, more oppression, etc. In the time of King Saul, God used the Philistines to pressure the tribes of Israel. Many centuries later God used the Assyrians to eradicate the idolatrous and pagan northern tribes of Israel after they broke away from Judah.

Now, recall the reasons for the conquest of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. The reason is given in the following words, “The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar” (*II Chronicles 36:15-17*).

In every situation, God warned and prophesied to His people about the consequences of their disobedience. We might assume that the Jewish people would have learned important lessons about obedience to God from the destruction of Jerusalem and their 70 years in exile, but, unfortunately, a few hundred years later, conditions would once again have deteriorated to the point when “the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy” except severe punishment. The consequence is stated in verses 24 and 25: “When they (the people of God) feel secure, he will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.”

Mercifully, in every case of persecution, when God deemed that the chastisement of His people was enough, He put a stop to the persecution and terminated the activity of the individual or group which had been His agent of retribution. Notice what happened in this vision, the end of verse 25: “Yet he,” that is, Antiochus, “will be destroyed, but not by human power.”

In the vision, God provided information about the length of the persecution by Antiochus. Verses 13 and 14 describe a conversation between “holy ones” in heaven, to which Daniel was permitted to listen. “It would take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary would be reconsecrated.” There are two opinions concerning these “evenings and mornings.” Some commentators think these words mean 1,150 full days (*three years, two months, 10 days*) since there were two burnt-offerings each day, one in the evening and one in the morning. Other commentators insist on 2,300 days (*six years, four months, 20 days*).

It is impossible to be precise about the meaning of the phrase, “evenings and mornings.” Actually, there is an element of plausibility about both opinions. The interval between the desecration of the altar in the sanctuary by Antiochus and its restoration was about 1,150 days, and it was about 2,300 days from the beginning of the atrocities against the Jewish people to the restoration.

Judas Maccabaeus was the man who led the Jewish resistance efforts against the forces of Antiochus, and made the reconsecration of the temple possible. The worship in the temple resumed in late December, 165 BC, and ever since then this event has been celebrated by the Jews as the Festival of Hanukkah.

There is much more in this chapter that we do not have time to cover today. When we come to chapter 11 we will learn more details about Antiochus Epiphanes.

The close of chapter 8 contains instructions for Daniel to “seal up the vision.” This statement did not mean that Daniel was to keep the vision a secret. Rather, the words, “to seal,” had the meaning of “to preserve.” Daniel was to make sure that a record of the information which had been communicated to him would be preserved for future readers. His prophetic writings would be especially valuable to those faithful Jews who would experience persecution 350 more years in the future.

The last verse in the chapter calls attention to the exhaustion and illness of Daniel. The information in the vision had drained him emotionally. He “was appalled” by the things which had been revealed to him. His people had not learned from their experiences in exile. He was shocked by the severity of the oppressive punishment and destruction future Jews would have to endure. I think Daniel understood the reasons why God had to allow this future time of brutality, but it did not lessen his grief and distress about what would happen to his people. God, in His grace and mercy, always sent prophets to warn the people about impending doom and to plead for faithful obedience to God. Daniel was one of those very important prophets called by God to provide spiritual guidance, not only to his fellow Jews, but to us as well.