

Daniel 8:1-27

A Ram, a Goat and Antiochus Epiphanes

God gives Daniel another vision of the future, involving conflicting kingdoms like before. But this one features more clearly information about the "little horn" who we met in the previous chapter.

The events stretch over several hundred years. It passes over the return of the Jews from captivity, described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and picks up when Alexander the Great defeats Persia, and at his death his empire is divided between four of his generals.

From out of that competition for power arises the "little horn" - Antiochus Epiphanes, who we have read about on Hanukkah.

The vision describes symbolically events of the Maccabean revolt and the persecutions by Antiochus, which are described in detail in the books of **1 and 2 Maccabees**.

Daniel is at Shushan the Persian palace, somewhere along the River Ulai. As before, the vision is described, and then the interpretation is given.

The Ram

Daniel 8:3-4 - "Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great."

We learn later that this is the Medo-Persian Empire, the larger, dominant horn representing Persia. Ancient historians say the ram was the royal ensign of the Persians.

The Goat

Daniel 8:5-8 - "And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven."

The goat represents the Greek (or Macedonian) kingdom of Alexander the Great. The ensign carried by the Macedonian army was a goat. The first king of Macedon, Caranos, was a descendant of Heracles. The oracle at Delphi told him he would find his kingdom where "white-horned goats rest at dawn." Searching with a band of soldiers in the north part of Greece he found a green valley after following a flock of goats. There he came upon the city of Edessa, surprised its defenders, took the city and renamed it Aegae, which means "goat town." From then on Macedonian armies carried emblems of the goat when they went to war.

At the height of his power Alexander died, and four of his generals (the four "notable ones") seized control and after years of war and treachery, inter-family murders and assassinations they divided up the lands he conquered among themselves.

The four generals were Cassander, ruling over Greece and its region; Lysimachus, ruling over Asia Minor; Seleucus, ruling over Syria and Persia including Israel; and Ptolemy, ruling over Egypt. But wars continued and boundaries periodically shifted until the Romans appeared on the scene.

Because of Alexander's conquests, the Greek language was spread throughout these lands and became the common language of commerce and diplomacy of the known civilized world - from Greece and Libya in the west to the Indus River in the east. God had established this to prepare for the quick spread of the gospel to the peoples of the world.

The 'Little Horn'

From out of one of the four "notables" arises "a little horn."

Although the vision's language is mysterious, scholars are certain this Little Horn refers to Antiochus IV, who became ruler of the Seleucid dynasty in 175 B.C. He gained the throne by murdering his brother, the rightful heir, and maintained his power through flattery, bribery and deceit. The coins of Antiochus Epiphanes were inscribed with this title: THEOS EPIPHANIES meaning, "God manifest." The Jews, who were persecuted severely during his reign, twisted the word to "Epimanes," meaning "Madman."

The books of 1 & 2 Maccabees, which record the persecutions of Antiochus and the rebellion of the Jews against him, can be read in parallel, explaining the vision.

Daniel 8:9 - "And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land."

"Pleasant" = *šəbîl / tsebee* - pleasant, glorious, beautiful - referring to Israel and the Promised Land. The term is used for Israel in **Psalms 48:2, Ezekiel 20:6, Ezekiel 25:9**, and in **Daniel 11:16 and 11:41**.

Daniel 8:10 - "And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them."

The host of heaven can refer to the stars and constellations, angelic hosts in heaven or simply to the people of God.

- **Genesis 15:5** - The promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars is interpreted to mean that "while Jews can fall to the dust, they can also rise to the stars."

- **Psalms 103:21** - "Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure."

- **Daniel 12:3** later states, "Then the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

In **Matthew 13:43**, Jesus seems to paraphrase this, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

- **Philippians 2:14-15** - "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as lights in the world." ("lights" = *phosteres*, which can mean a star)

The verse is probably referring to believers who were killed during Antiochus' persecutions.

Daniel 8:11-12 - "Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered."

By taking on the title Theo Epiphanes or "God Manifest" he declared himself to be the incarnation of Zeus. Thus he "opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God," as Paul said of the "man of sin" in **2 Thessalonians 2:3-8**. Antiochus defiled the altar in the Temple with pigs blood, then tore it down, halting all sacrifices. He erected a statue of Zeus there instead, in effect setting himself up (as Zeus's manifestation on earth) in the Temple of God.

"And the table of the shewbread, and the pouring vessels, and the vials, and the censers of gold, and the veil, and the crown, and the golden ornaments that were before the temple, all which he pulled off." (**1 Maccabees 1:22**)

"a host was given him" - A number of Jews left the faith to become part of this Hellenized society, seduced into abandoning the Torah.

"cast down the truth to the ground" - Torah scrolls were burned, it was forbidden to teach the Torah, or to circumcise.

"And whosoever was found with any the book of the testament, or if any committed to the law, the king's commandment was, that they should put him to death. Thus did they by their authority unto the Israelites every month, to as many as were found in the cities. Now the five and twentieth day of the month they did sacrifice upon the idol altar, which was upon the altar of God. At which time according to the commandment they put to death certain women, that had caused their children to be circumcised." (**1 Maccabees 1:57-60**)

Daniel 8:13-14 - "Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."

2,300 days = six years, three months, and eighteen days

It was 2,300 days from the time when the apostate High Priest Menelaus adopted Antiochus' Hellenization decrees until the 25th of the month Chislew (celebrated as Hanukkah now) when the Temple was cleansed.

The Interpretation, and One Like the Son of Man

Daniel 8:15-18 - "And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision."

"One who had the appearance of a man" is this same One we've seen before in the fiery furnace and the lions' den. Only God - this time in the form of the pre-incarnate Christ - could command Gabriel, an archangel.

"at the time of the end shall be the vision" - i.e. there is a set, fixed, and determined time, when the vision shall end, and have its full accomplishment; namely, when the 2,300 days are expired. (Not that this vision is not for the End Times or Last Days, which is what the KJV sounds like). A similar phrase and meaning appears in verse 19: "for at the time appointed the end shall be." But there is leeway for interpreting its meaning to include an end times Antichrist.

Daniel 8:18-19 - "Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be."

The NET says, "Then he said, 'I am going to inform you about what will happen in the latter time of wrath, for the vision pertains to the appointed time of the end.'"

Aben Ezra, a rabbinical scholar in the 1100s, translates this as, "is declared the wrath of God upon Israel in the days of wicked Greece, and in the days of Antiochus, until the Hasmonaeans cleansed the temple:" for at the time appointed the end shall be...

The time period is stated with enough latitude to have both a near fulfillment in Antiochus and serve to portray him as a type of a distant fulfillment in the Antichrist.

The angel here gives Daniel the interpretation. Because God is focused on his people Israel, the events foretold in the vision directly relate to the fate of God's people the Jews and their territory.

Daniel 8:20-22 interprets the dream as explained above. The ram is the Medo-Persian empire, the goat is Alexander the Great and the four notables are his generals.

Daniel 8:23-24 - "And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people."

"practice" = 'āśâ - do, make, build, execute, accomplish plans

"not by his own power" - Antiochus gained and kept power through treachery and deceit for the most part rather than force of arms. An alternate explanation is that he arose by the power of Satan, or behind that, the power of God.

The End of Antiochus

Daniel 8:25 - "And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand."

"without hand" = like the stone cut without hands represents Christ, here it means that no human hand brought Antiochus down, only God Himself.

"he shall magnify himself in his heart" - Pride is the characteristic of Antiochus and also the Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians - and of Satan.

"by peace shall destroy many" - part of his deception was breaking peace treaties.

"And thus he that a little afore thought he might command the waves of the sea, (so proud was he beyond the condition of man) and weigh the high mountains in a balance, was now cast on the ground, and carried in an horse litter, shewing forth unto all the manifest power of God." (**2 Maccabees 9:8**)

Antiochus was broken by the direct hand of God. "He fell ill of a bad disease, and at the

cry of one of his elephants his chariot was overturned, and he fell on the ground, and his bones were broken." Then it got worse:

"But the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, smote him with an incurable and invisible plague: or as soon as he had spoken these words, a pain of the bowels that was remediless came upon him, and sore torments of the inner parts; ... So that the worms rose up out of the body of this wicked man, and whiles he lived in sorrow and pain, his flesh fell away, and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to all his army." (2 **Maccabees 9:5,9**)

This was much like King Herod's death in **Acts 12:23**.

Daniel 8:26 - "And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days."

The death of Antiochus was more than 300 years in the future from Daniel's day.

Daniel 8:27 - "And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it."

Although Daniel was told to "shut up the vision" it remained written in the book of Daniel, although not understood until the time of Alexander the Great.

Alexander the Great at Jerusalem

According to Josephus the first century historian, in 332 B.C. Alexander was besieging the city of Tyre, and sent a letter to the Jewish High Priest in Jerusalem requesting supplies and extra soldiers, as well as whatever tribute he was usually sending to Darius the Persian king. The High Priest said he could not break his word to Darius. Alexander was enraged, and vowed to teach the Jews a lesson. The High Priest was terrified, but he had a dream from God which told him to surrender to Alexander, open the gates and line the streets to welcome him when he came, and pray diligently.

When Alexander did arrive with a contingent of soldiers, the High Priest met him, adorned in his high priestly vestments and breastplate reserved only for Temple use. Alexander approached him reverently and saluted him warmly. He explained he had seen in a vision a person in just such a garment assuring him back in Macedonia that he would succeed in his venture to conquer Asia.

"And when the Book of Daniel was showed him wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended."

The prophecy that drew his attention was this chapter.

See Josephus:

<https://www.livius.org/sources/content/josephus/jewish-antiquities/alexander-the-great->

visits-jerusalem/

Addendum: 'Let Angels Prostrate Fall'

- **Daniel 8:18** - "Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright."

There is a sequence of events that we find repeated throughout the Bible. When someone encounters the presence of God or the Angel of God, or "one like the Son of Man," they fall down on their face "as if they are dead."

- **1 Chronicles 21:16** --"And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces."

- **Judges 13:20** - "When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell facedown to the ground."

- **Daniel 10:7-12** - "And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands."

- **Ezekiel 1:28** - "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell facedown and heard a voice speaking."

At the Transfiguration:

- **Matthew 17:6-7** - "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. Then Jesus came over and touched them. "Get up," He said. "Do not be afraid."

Paul:

- **Acts 9:3-4** - "As Saul drew near to Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. / He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'"

John:

- **Revelation 1:17** - "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."

- **Revelation 7:11** - "And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,"

This image of prophets and disciples, and even angels face down, often in a deep sleep, like Abraham at the Horror of Great Darkness (**Genesis 15:12**), is a wonderful picture of encountering our death with Christ on the cross. Our old man Adam is crucified with Christ.

- **Romans 6:3-4** - "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Stated another way, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live."
(**Exodus 33:20**)

But the death pictured in these scenes is followed by a "resurrection!"

- **Daniel 8:18** - "...he touched me, and set me upright."

- **Daniel 10:12** - "...an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands."

- **Matthew 17:7** - "Then Jesus came over and touched them. "Get up," He said. 'Do not be afraid.'"

- **Romans 6:5** - "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"

When we truly encounter Christ, we experience our death, and can say with Daniel "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption."

But was also know from these visions that God is in control of history and the victory in His - His kingdom endures forever.

- **Revelation 1:18** - "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."