

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **The Ram and the Male Goat - Daniel 8**

What relevance has the prophecies of Daniel to twenty first century Christians? - You may well ask! In this series of Truth for Today talks we are trying to show that Daniel the prophet is still relevant to us in the twenty first century. Two recent events, which occurred towards the end of 2008, serve as examples of how chapters 7 and 8 still have a voice to people in today's world:

1. All members of the European Union have now signed the Lisbon Treaty. This further integration of Europe caused last week's speaker to comment that many people see this as the beginning of the fulfilment of Revelation 13 prophecies, which show that the Roman Empire is to rise again.
2. Iran has been letting the world, in general, and Britain in particular, know that it's a power still to be reckoned with. First of all, Iran is thought to have restarted its nuclear programme. Secondly, it recently captured some yachtsmen from the UK - flexing its muscle, you might say. In today's talk we find out something about its resident power, as seen in the Ram with two horns.

As we study chapter 8 today, we should, like Daniel, seek to understand what it actually means, verse 15. Then we can pray that it will have some practical effect upon our lives.

### **Scene-setting Prophecies**

First of all, the Hebrew word for a dream or a vision is derived from a common Hebrew verb meaning "to see." In those ancient times, dreams and visions were often from God Himself. This was the case for Daniel the prophet, but God also showed him the meaning of these dreams or visions. Through Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the great Metal Man Image in chapter 2, God revealed, in picture form, an outline of the course of world history. Starting with Nebuchadnezzar himself, these periods of world rule introduced "The Times of the Gentiles", an expression used by the Lord Jesus Himself in Luke 21:24. *Truth for Today* talk T0519, on Daniel 2, entitled "God's plan for the ages", noted that these Gentile world rulers were symbolised by the metals of the image, which represent God's view of each system of rule. As dominant world powers they'd supersede each other, but they continue to exist throughout history, in some form or other, until they're ultimately replaced by the everlasting Messianic kingdom, 2:44-45. Then in last week's talk, Daniel's dream in chapter 7 was seen as an advance in revelation and showed that God symbolically viewed these world powers as grotesque beasts. Their lack of moral justice earned them this description. Chapter 7 concentrated on the ferocious character of the fourth empire, the beast with ten horns, which was terrifying, dreadful, exceedingly strong, with great iron teeth, and so different from the other three beasts, 7:7 and 19-26.

In chapter 8 Daniel received another visionary message from God that spoke about the then-future second and third world empires. This dream was encoded in symbols which required the interpretive assistance of the angel Gabriel, see verses 15-26. An animal's horn, which symbolizes the military and political power of the kingdoms, is the main symbol used. The course and duration of the second and third empires of the former prophecies are now described in even greater detail than in Chapters 2 and 7. Also, they are now specifically named in verses 20-21 as Medo-Persia and Greece. At 8:1 the book of Daniel reverts back to the Hebrew language, which was used for 1:1-2:3. 2:4-7:28 was originally written in the Chaldean language. This reversion gives us a clue as to the thrust of the chapter 8 prophecy - it's about how these world empires would impact upon the national life of Israel. The chapter divides into two parts:

- Verses 1-14: the vision
- Verses 15-27: the interpretation, in which the focus of the angel's attention is the "Little Horn" described in verse 9.

### **Verses 1-2: The Time and the Place of the Vision**

It was the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar of the Babylonian empire, verse 1. In this new vision, Daniel saw himself a few miles outside of Shushan by the canal Ulai, verse 2. Shushan was a capital city of the then rising Persian power. It lay in the highlands about 230 miles to the east of Babylon and north of the Persian Gulf. Evidently it was the scene of the first victories of the coming Persian Empire under Cyrus. However, there were approximately 3

years remaining for the Babylonian empire. Daniel was still contemplating the previous vision (of chapter 7) and was probably asking: "When and how would the 'bear' empire come?"

### **Verses 3-4: The next Gentile power, the Medo-Persian Empire**

In verse 3 Daniel saw a ram with two enormous horns. These two powers (or horns) were high but one was higher (that is, more powerful) than the other. The higher horn came up (that is, arose as a power) second. This ram charged westward and northward and southward in an unstoppable manner: "No beast (that is, no other nation) could stand before him, and there was no one (that is, there was no king or ruler) who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great", verse 4 (English Standard Version). From verse 20 we learn that the two horns of the ram "are the kings of Media and Persia". Verse 4 particularly describes Cyrus the Persian, who was more powerful than Darius the Mede (the ruler who actually overthrew the Babylonian empire as graphically described in 5:24-30.)

### **Verses 5-8: The Grecian Kingdom**

Just as Daniel was considering the ram, a male goat invaded the Medo-Persian kingdom from the west, from what we now know as Greece. It rushed "across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground", verse 5. It "had a prominent horn between its eyes [and it] came [running] to the ram with the two horns, in powerful wrath". Because the Persians had previously attacked Greek states, the goat "was enraged against the ram and struck him and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power", verses 5-7. Verse 21 informs us that "the goat is the king of Greece" and that "the great horn between his eyes is the first king", who, from history we can identify as Alexander the Great. He launched his attack against Persia Empire in 334 BC and by 323 BC he had essentially subdued it. Alexander's conquest was so rapid that it seemed as if he flew across the earth - "without touching the ground", verse 5. Verses 6-7 describe his rapid and ferocious revenge victory. The Persian forces actually outnumbered the Greeks, but in two decisive battles, the Medo-Persian Empire collapsed. The ram had his two horns broken in the battle and his body was trampled to the ground, leaving him utterly powerless, verse 7. Now the goat became exceedingly great and ruled supreme. But when he was strong, verse 8 says his single great horn was broken off and instead of it there came up four strong horns all pointing in different directions, that is, toward the four winds of heaven. The breaking of the large horn pictures Alexander's sudden death. He died of a fever at Babylon in 323 BC at the height of his career, before he was 33 years old. Having conquered most of the known world, including India, he did not live to consolidate the empire he had won. It was divided up to his four ruling army generals.

### **The four divisions of the Grecian kingdom were:**

Seleucus ruled from northern Syria to central Asia; Ptolemy ruled Palestine, Egypt and southern Syria; Macedonia (Greece) was ruled by Cassander; and Lysimachus ruled over Thrace. The first two of these eventually became significant to Israel as we shall see in chapter 11 where they are called the king of the north and the king of the south; the latter two were eventually absorbed into the Roman Empire.

### **The 'Little Horn', verses 9-14**

Verse 9 tells of a new powerful king, the 'Little Horn', springing up from Syria. It pushed south and east reaching the pleasant or glorious land, a description of the territory of Israel. This king then battled against God's people, who are described as the host of heaven in verse 10 (in the vision the horn reached to the sky!) He trampled underfoot some stars, that is, Jewish leaders and took control of the nation. The expressions host of heaven and the stars are symbols for God's earthly people, Israel and their rulers- see 12:3 and Genesis 15:5.

### **What happened? Why? For how long?**

Not content with military success, this little horn "magnified himself even to the Prince of the host, and from [this Prince] the continual sacrifice was taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down...a time of trial was appointed unto the continual sacrifice by reason of transgression. And it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised and prospered. [Daniel] heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that one who spoke, 'How long shall be the vision of the continual sacrifice and of the transgression that makes desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden down under foot?' He said unto me, 'Until 2,300 evenings and mornings: then shall the sanctuary be vindicated'", verses 11-14 (Darby). This was fulfilled 300 years later, when Antiochus Epiphanes overthrew Temple worship in Jerusalem in 167 BC His desecration of the Temple with the abomination of desolation lasted 2,300 days or 6½ years, until it was cleansed by the Maccabees, who restored it to its rightful state, verse 14.

## Who is Antiochus Epiphanes? Why was he permitted by God to do this?

Verse 11 tells us that Antiochus Epiphanes set himself to be equal to Jehovah, called here the "Prince of the Host", who in the future will be Christ himself, as we shall see in verse 25. Antiochus Epiphanes considered himself to be an incarnate manifestation of Olympian Zeus, whose statue he installed in the sanctuary of the Temple. He even sacrificed a sow on the bronze altar! God allowed all this to happen because of the "transgression that makes desolate", that is, the blatant disobedience of the Jews who proved unfaithful to the laws of Jehovah. (This attitude will be repeated again by the nation at the end times in what verse 19 describes as the latter end of the indignation. A prominent aspect of this continued unfaithfulness will be another "abomination of desolation", which will be set up in the future Temple - see 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11.)

### Verses 15-19: The Interpreter, Gabriel

The angel Gabriel appeared and was commanded by God to explain the vision to Daniel. From 9:21 and Luke 1:19 and 26-38 we know that Gabriel is concerned with Israel and its Messiah. When Daniel saw Gabriel he was terrified and fell down into a coma-like sleep. But Gabriel awoke him and set him back on his feet. Twice Gabriel told Daniel that the vision had more properly to do with end times:

- Understand, O son of man; for the vision belongs to the time of the end, verse 17 (English Standard Version).
- "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end," verse 19.

Indignation is what God feels about Israel's continued unfaithfulness, for example, "yet a very little while, and the indignation shall be accomplished [against you Israelites]", Isaiah 10:25.

### The Interpretation: History and Prophecy

To us, verses 20-22 are now facts of history. The Babylonian empire under Belshazzar soon fell to the Medes and Persians, see 5:31. Though the Medes initially conquered Babylon, it was the Persians who became the dominant power. The duality of the Medo-Persian Empire had been implied by the silver arms of the Metal Man Image in 2:32; and was more specifically inferred by the bear that rose up on one side in 7:5. Here in 8:20, the power of the Ram is described by its two horns, which symbolise the kings of Medo Persia, the latter being the greater, verse 3. Centred east of Babylon their kingdom extended:

- Westward and overcame the entire Babylonian empire, including Syria,
- Southward engulfing Egypt and Ethiopia.
- Northward, through to Armenia and the Caspian Sea region and onward to conquer the Lydian kingdom in Asia Minor.

(These extensions were symbolised in the three bones in the mouth of the bear, 7:5.)

However, after 200 years, the Medo-Persian Empire suddenly collapsed before the might of Alexander the Great, the charging he-goat, verses 5 and 21. The four horns on the goat, like the four heads of the leopard in chapter 7, symbolised the fourfold division of the Grecian empire that occurred when Alexander died, verse 22. "Not with its power" means that none of Alexander's four generals ruled with the same strength that Alexander had, as described in verse 8.

But in verse 9 we were immediately introduced to the **little horn**. Thus, this prophecy skips from 301 BC, the time of the division of Alexander's empire, to 175 BC, and Antiochus Epiphanes. He was the eighth king of the Syrian dynasty and he reigned from 175 to 164 BC He was marked by four characteristics:

1. His military success, verse 9 - he waged successful campaigns against Egypt, against uprisings in the east, and against Canaan.
2. His persecutions of the people of God, verse 10 - thousands of Jews were killed when he attacked and burned Jerusalem. Many Jews were forced into apostasy.
3. His blasphemy, verse 11.
4. His desecrations of the sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem, verses 11-12.

However, the king of fierce, or bold, countenance described in verse 23 cannot be limited to Antiochus Epiphanes for verse 26 says that "the vision refers to many days in the future". Although the nation of Israel now exists again, its Temple doesn't. At some future point in time, God will use the nations around Israel to punish them for their continued infidelity. In verse 23, the use of the words "the latter end" and the expression "when the transgressors have reached their fullness" must mean when the sinfulness of the Jews has reached that when God must punish them - see 1

Thessalonians 2:16. In those last days, a future 'Little Horn', with all the characteristics of Antiochus Epiphanes, shall arise to be an enemy of Israel. (He is known in other Old Testament scriptures as the Assyrian, for example, Isaiah 10:5 and 24-25.)

### **What is this future 'Little Horn' going to be like?**

From verse 23, we learn that he will be a master of evil intrigue, "understanding dark sentences". He will use a foreign power to gain access to the apostate Jewish nation for verse 24 says that "his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power". Verse 25 says he will deceitfully seduce them with a false religion as Antiochus Epiphanes did in the past: "through his policy he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and in their security shall he destroy many". Most significantly, he opposes Christ, the Prince of princes, who by His second coming, will suddenly appear and personally destroy him for verse 25 says he is to be "broken without human hand", (New King James Version) (Christ is identified in the Metal Man Image as "a stone cut out without hands", 2:34).

### **Do you feel ill after hearing this talk?**

"I feel a sick note coming on" is a statement I've heard a few times during my lifetime, usually when someone has started to feel unwell at work. The vision of chapter 8 caused Daniel to faint and to be so ill that he was unable to work for some days, verse 27. In last week's talk, we learnt from 7:28 that the vision of the 4 beasts troubled his mind and affected his physical appearance, causing him to be pale-faced. In 8:1 Daniel tells us he had kept this first vision in his heart for about 2 years, presumably without it having had any more deleterious effect upon him. So we need to ask why this new vision had such an appalling effect upon him. Verse 15 tells us that Daniel set his mind to understand the vision he had seen of the Ram, the Male Goat and its Little Horn. Such was its interpretation, as given by Gabriel, that Daniel suffered a severe emotional reaction. He was overcome and lay sick for some days. Although he returned to work on the very important matters of "the king's business", he continued to be appalled by the vision because he did not understand it, verse 27. We may well ask why he was in such a state of ill-health. The answer is that the vision was a prophecy of the future course of those Gentile rulers and their impact upon his beloved people, the nation of Israel. So what about us today? How should the prophecies of Scripture affect us? When we realise that these events are in the near future to us, and that they lead up to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom at the second coming of Christ, they should both comfort and trouble us.

- First, the positive: Paul instructs us in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 that "God has not destined [Christian believers] for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him". Our hope is "to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from [this wrath that is coming upon the world]", 1 Thessalonians 1:10.
- Secondly, the negative is that "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, [he will inflict] vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day," 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. Such truths should affect us in a similar way to how the vision affected Daniel and gave him such great concern. Daniel was told to shut up the vision in verse 26 for it would take place in the distant future. For us the coming of the Lord draws near and we should be vocal in warning of the consequences for our generation of refusing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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