



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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## Chapter 8: The Vision of the Ram and the Goat

It is at this point in his writing that Daniel switches from Aramaic back to his native Hebrew.

### 8:1-2, Introduction to the Vision

The third year of the reign of King Belshazzar: This vision was given to Daniel while Babylon was secure and powerful, before the events of Chapter 5. Though this vision tells of the emergence (and destiny) of the Greek Empire, the Greek Empire was not of any concern in Babylon at the time this prophecy was given.

I was in Shushan, the citadel: Daniel was in Shushan on business for the king, which he notes later in the chapter (verse 27).

### 8:3-4, The Mighty Ram

A ram which had two horns: We're see in verse 20 that this ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire, which we know from Chapter 5 ended Belshazzar's reign and succeeded the Babylonian Empire. Not only that, but the ram was the national emblem of Persia, stamped on Persian coins, and even on the headdresses of Persian emperors.

The two horns were high; but one was higher than the other: This is an picture of the relationship between the Medes and the Persians, in which the Persians were larger in number and mightier in armed forces. The Persians also emerge in written history after the Medes ("the higher one came up last").

Pushing westward, northward, and southward: This, too, is descriptive of the future conquests of The Medo-Persian Empire, which took lots of territory North, South, and West, but made no major conquests towards the East.

Commentator Adam Clarke:

*“The principle theatre of their wars, says Calmet, was against the SCYTHIANS, northward; against the GREEKS, westward; and against the EGYPTIANS, southward.”*

### **8:5-8, A Male Goat Conquers the Ram**

A male goat came from the west: We seen in verses 21-22 that the male goat represents Greece, and its horns represent the rulers of the Greek Empire.

Adam Clarke again:

*“...Two hundred years before the time of Daniel, they (the Greeks) were called, the goats’ people.”*

Across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground: This description of the male goat’s movements proved to be very accurate regarding Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire:

- The Greek Empire rose from the west of previous empires
- The Greek Empire rose with great speed (suddenly... without touching the ground)
- The Greek Empire had a notable ruler, Alexander the Great (a “notable horn”)
- The Greek Empire had a famous war with the Medo-Persian Empire (“I saw him confronting the ram”)
- Some of the fiercest battles of ancient history were fought between the Greeks and the Persians
- The Greek Empire conquered the Medo-Persian Empire (“no one that could deliver the ram from his hand”)
- The reign of Alexander the Great was cut short suddenly (“the large horn was broken”)
- After the end of Alexander’s reign, the Greek Empire was divided among four rulers (“in place of it four notable ones came up”)
- The four rulers of the Greek Empire after Alexander ruled their own dominions, not the entire empire together (“came up toward the four winds of heaven”)

- Alexander’s four leading generals divided the empire among themselves after his death (by force):
  - Cassander, ruling over Greece and that entire region
  - Lysimachus, ruling over Asia Minor
  - Seleucus, ruling over Syria and Israel
  - Ptolemy, ruling over Egypt

The male goat grew very great: The Empire of Alexander’s the Great was not only vast in its size, but also in its transformative cultural power. Alexander the Great was determined to bring Greek civilization, culture, and language to every land he conquered.

It’s not going too far to suggest that God used Alexander’s passion to spread Greek culture to prepare the world for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of Alexander’s influence, *koine* Greek became the *lingua franca* (common language) of the civilized western world – and the language of the New Testament!

### **8:9-12, The Strong Horn that Arises from the Four Horns of the Goat**

A little horn which grew exceeding great: One of the four successors to Alexander the Great, and subsequently Seleucus, was Antiochus IV Epiphanes (“God manifest”), who rules from 175 BC until his death in 164 BC. He not only ruled over Syria and Israel’s land under the Seleucid dynasty, but like his father before him (Antiochus III), conquered portions of Ptolemy’s domain in Egypt. He is most infamous for his persecution of the Jews in Judea and Samaria, and his attempt to crush the rebellion of the Jewish Maccabees. Some of his contemporaries, as well as more modern historians, consider(ed) him to be a mad man. Jews and his enemies even called him “Epimanes” (“mad”), a play on his chosen name.

Epiphanes obtained his throne via murder and deceit, and legitimized his rule mainly via flattery and bribery.

The Glorious Land: This term and similar wording was used to refer to Israel in Ezekiel 20:6, Ezekiel 25:9, Psalm 48:2, and later in the Daniel (Chapter 11).

He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host: Antiochus Epiphanes is a direct fulfillment of this prophecy. He blasphemed God and commanded worship directed towards himself. He banned temple sacrifices in Jerusalem, and desecrated the temple.

It cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground: “The host” and stars are symbols used in the Old Testament for angels, kings and leaders, or the whole

people of God. The terms stars of heaven (e.g. Genesis 12:3 and 15:5) and the hosts of the LORD (e.g. Exodus 12:41) are at times used of God's people in general. This prediction was fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes and his attacks against rulers and against God's people in general.

And trampled them: Antiochus was an infamous persecutor of the Jewish people. He wanted them to submit to Greek culture and customs and was more than willing to use murder and violence to compel them to that end.

Antiochus's oppression of the Jews came to a head in December of 168 BC when he returned in defeat from Alexandria. He ordered his generals to seize Jerusalem -- on a Sabbath. There he set up an idol of Zeus and desecrated the altar by an offering of swine, sprinkling the pig's juices around the sanctuary.

By some estimates Antiochus Epiphanes was responsible for the murder of more than 100,000 Jews. In the Apocrypha, 1 Maccabees describes how Antiochus persecuted the Jews, and describes his blasphemies:

- *Two years later the king sent his chief collector of tribute to the cities of Judah. When he came to Jerusalem with a powerful force, he deceitfully addressed the people there with sentiments of peace. Once he had gained their confidence, he suddenly launched a savage attack on the city and exterminated many of the people of Israel. He plundered the city and set it on fire. He demolished its dwellings and the walls that encircled the city, took the women and children captive, and seized the livestock. (1 Maccabees 1:29-32)*
- *Then the king issued an edict to his whole kingdom that all of his subjects should become a united people, with each nation abandoning its particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the decree of the king, and many among the Israelites adopted his religion, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. The king also sent messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah with edicts commanding them to adopt practices that were foreign to their country: to prohibit holocausts, sacrifices, and libations in the sanctuary, to profane the Sabbaths and feast days, to defile the temple and its priests, to build altars, temples, and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine[k] and other unclean beasts, to leave their sons uncircumcised, and to allow themselves to be defiled with every kind of impurity and abomination, so that they would forget the law and change all their observances. Anyone who refused to obey the command of the king was to be put to death. (1 Maccabees 1:41-50)*

- *Many of the people, abandoning the law, joined them and committed evil deeds in the land, thereby driving Israel into hiding in every possible place of refuge. On the fifteenth day of the month Chislev, in the year one hundred and forty-five, the king erected upon the altar of holocausts the abomination that causes desolation, and pagan altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah. Incense was offered at the doors of the houses and in the streets. Any scrolls of the law that were found were torn to pieces and destroyed by fire. If any people were discovered in possession of a book of the covenant or acting in conformity with the law, they were condemned to death by the decree of the king. Month after month these wicked people used their power against any loyal Israelite found in the towns. On the twenty-fifth day of each month they offered sacrifice on the altar erected on top of the altar of holocausts. In accordance with the royal decree, any women who had their children circumcised were put to death, with their infants hung from their necks; also put to death were their families and those who had circumcised them. (1 Maccabees 1:52-61)*

Since most Bibles do not include the Apocrypha, you can find The Book of 1 Maccabees at these sites:

- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Maccabees+1&version=NCB>  
(New Catholic Bible, the version I used for the above quotes)
- <https://ebible.org/kjv/1MA01.htm> (King James Version)  
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=4219672>  
(Revised Standard Version)

Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices: What transgression? Weren't the Jews innocent victims? Seems that they never are. In this case, the first attack of Antiochus against the Jews of this time was to settle a rivalry for the office of high priest. A good and respected high priest, Onias III, was removed from office and was replaced with his brother Jason after Jason bribed Antiochus. Then Menelaus (another brother) in 172 BC paid Antiochus an *even bigger bribe* to replace Jason. A year later Menelaus started selling many of the temple's gold utensils to raise money to pay off the bribe. Onias III rebuked him, and Menelaus had him murdered. Meanwhile, Jason gathered armies and fought against Menelaus to regain the office of High Priest. Antiochus Epiphanes came in to Jerusalem in 171 BC to defend the man who paid him a bigger bribe to be the High Priest.

## **8:13-14, The Sanctuary's Desecration lasts 2,300 Days**

Then I heard a holy one speaking: Who is this holy one Daniel hears? Many think this is an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. This is possible, but could also have been any other angel or messenger from God. The text doesn't provide enough information to be certain.

It's interesting that Daniel didn't ask this question. He heard "the holy ones" speaking to each other, and one of *them* asked the question. They wanted to know how long the sacrifices would be suspended and how long the sanctuary would be desecrated.

For two thousand three hundred days: Daniel heard a holy one say "two thousand three hundred mornings and evenings." So being the humans we are, we like to debate whether this means 2,300 days or 1,150 days. 'Tis true that the eventual cleansing of the temple in 165 BC is about 7 years from 171 BC, the year Antiochus Epiphanes began his persecutions in earnest. Close, but not an exact match. Or, 1,150 days comes close to the time between the desecration of the temple and the cleansing of it.

Back to the Apocrypha, this was indeed the time of the Maccabean tribulation (168-165 BC), and at the end of that tribulation the sanctuary was "cleansed" by Judas Maccabeus, when he restored the evening and morning sacrifices (2 Maccabees 10:1-5).

So once again, rather than trying to establish an exact match for the numbers in the historical timeline, perhaps what we would first understand is that this time of persecution and blasphemy is limited, and it is God who establishes the timeline, *not Antiochus Epiphanes!*

This verse has been (mis-)used to produce "prophecies" regarding the end times. One strangely popular interpretation of this passage took it to mean one *year* for every day. William Miller, founder of Millerism, used 2,300 "year-days" to calculate that Jesus would return in 1844 (2,300 years after Persian King Cyrus issued the decree to rebuild the temple). He was not correct, as it turns out. His movement, however, ended up evolving into what we know now as Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and several other movements.

Let scripture interpret scripture, and we can avoid (and call out!) such false prophecies. We know from John 10:22 that Jesus recognized that the temple was properly cleansed and rededicated when He attended the Feast of Dedication, which commemorated the cleansing and rededication of the temple after the desecration brought by Antiochus Epiphanes. How the Millerites and all agreed with Miller's interpretation missed this is

puzzling, to say the least! Even Adam Clarke, who is cited above, wrote in the 1820's about the possibility of it being valid. He arrived at date of AD 1996 as the cleansing. He, too, was wrong.

Then the sanctuary shall be cleansed: This prophecy was given to Daniel about 350 years before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. Great prophetic fulfillment like this demonstrates that God not only knows the future, He also guides the future.

### **8:15-19, Gabriel Appears to Daniel**

Then I heard a human voice from the Ulai cry out: Still in the midst of this vision, Daniel how a voice from the river, instructing Gabriel to explain the vision. While not actually in the original Hebrew, the sense of rest of the passage is "Then Daniel completely freaked out!"

The vision refers to the time of the end: Gabriel assures Daniel that this vision had to do with end times, which does not seem to soothe Daniel too much, as he falls face-down on the bank of the river.

I will show you what will take place later in the period of wrath, for at the appointed time there will be an end: Wait, didn't we say that so much of this prophecy has already played out in history from our perspective? Yes. This vision/prophecy was indeed fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes, but it also has **later fulfillments** in the **Antichrists** to come, referring ultimately to the end of Earthly time. Antiochus Epiphanes is an obvious "Antichrist of the Old Testament." He prefigures the Antichrists of today and in the future, until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.

### **8:20-22, The Ram and the Goat Identified**

The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king: This was fulfilled in history by Alexander the Great (see the comments under 8:5-8).

Four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power: This was fulfilled in history by the four generals who divided Alexander's Empire between them (as discussed under 8:5-8).

### **8:23-27, The Rise and Fall of the Little Horn**

...Bold in countenance and skilled in intrigue: Again, a great match in history is found in Antiochus Epiphanes, who was known for his cruel brutality. He prefigures other rulers in history, too, who advance through both ruthlessness and cunning

His strength will continually increase, but not by any power of his own: Antiochus Epiphanes like all of his ilk was empowered by Satan, and allowed by God.

...Succeed in whatever he does: Antiochus Epiphanes looked like a total success. Evil men (and women, to be inclusive!) often do. They are attractive in devious ways, drawing followers and sycophants to themselves.

He will finally challenge the power of the Prince of princes: In hating, oppressing, and warring against the people of God, Antiochus Epiphanes actually hated God Himself. The same is true of all antichrists, past, present, and future. They hated Jews, they hate and will hate Christians, even if not openly at first, and in every case they are waging battle against God.

...He will be broken without any human intervention: According to 2 Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanes died of a divinely-inflicted disease, not by the hand of man. In a similar way no man will ultimately defeat the antichrists; God will strike them all down.

Therefore seal up the vision: Daniel must do this because at the time the vision referred to all future events, some of which Daniel would witness, and therefore recall this vision to encourage other believers (like us!) We have the privilege of seeing even more of it revealed in history, but the ultimate end is still to come!

Fainted and was sick... I was astonished: This is a *lot* to take in. Daniel probably couldn't understand why God would allow such persecution of His people and the apparent "success" of such evil men.

I went about the king's business: Even so, Daniel didn't let either spiritual disquiet or physical weakness keep him from doing his duty. This shows us that our interest in prophecy should make us more concerned with being about *our* King's business, and not worried about whether He takes notice of our circumstances, because we are assured over and over that indeed He does.

I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it: It wasn't because God never wanted this prophecy to be understood; there is no reason He would reveal something that could never be understood. The reason Daniel could not (yet!) understand it was because the vision was reserved for partial fulfillment in Daniel's future, and ultimate fulfillment far later. Remember the instruction given to John in Revelation 22:10:

*And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."*