**DANIEL CHAPTER 8**

Daniel Chapters 7 and 8 prophesy about future tyrants. Both are depicted by animals with horns. However, the visions are NOT of the same people. As we saw last week the prophecy of Chapter 7 dealt primarily with the rise of the antichrist which we are familiar with from the book of Revelation. The prophecy here in Chapter 8 focuses is on a totally different time in human history. It will be speaking about two different rulers which we will be identifying as we go thru the passage.

In Daniel Chapter 8 the language abruptly changes from Aramaic (the language of the Babylonians in Daniel’s day) to Hebrew.

[Question 1] This indicates a shift in Daniel’s emphasis away from the Gentile world and to Daniel’s own people, the Jews. Think about it. If I wanted to send a message to the people of France, what language would I write my message in? French, of course. The remainder of the book of Daniel was written in Hebrew because it deals with events that will have a direct impact on the Jewish people, on Jerusalem, their Messiah and the temple.

Like we did last week, we’ll skip around in the chapter. I’ll read the vision that Daniel sees. Then follow it up with its interpretation later in the chapter. Let’s take a look at Daniel Chapter 8…

READ Daniel 8:1. This second vision occurs two years after the first vision recorded in Chapter 7. God has given Daniel plenty of time to digest the myriad of information he received in the first vision. He clearly saw that the once-mighty Babylonian Empire was in decline. In the first vision God revealed that Babylon would one day be overshadowed, yes conquered, by another world power. As Daniel views the events of his day, that world power, depicted in his vision by the bear, will be the Medo-Persian alliance, which has been gaining strength. What Daniel cannot see just yet is the identity of the third kingdom that would rise up, depicted in his first vision by the leopard.

READ Daniel 8:2. Though Daniel is physically living in Babylon, for this second vision he is translated some 250 miles away to the winter retreat at Susa. He sees himself standing by a manmade canal which flows by Susa. Why is Daniel in Susa of all places?

[Question 2] At the time of Daniel, Susa was a relatively small and isolated citadel. But it eventually becomes the capital of the mighty Persian Empire. In fact, the events that are recorded in the book of Esther take place in Susa some 80 years after Daniel’s vision here in Chapter 8.

READ Daniel 8:15-17. Daniel’s second vision ends and he is again provided an angelic interpreter. The angel is introduced here as Gabriel.

[Question 3] This is the same angel Gabriel who 550 years later will announce to Zechariah (some translations call him Zacharias) the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-23). He also addresses Mary as the one chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38).

Daniel is frightened when he sees the angel Gabriel. This is a common reaction by people in the Bible whenever they have an encounter with God’s heavenly messengers.

READ Daniel 8:18-19. Gabriel touches Daniel and stands him onto his feet. He then proceeds to explain to Daniel the meaning of the vision he has seen. All the events that are foretold here in Chapter 8 will be fulfilled within 200 years. They are future from Daniel’s vantage point but for us sitting here in the year 2023 A.D. they are past events. We can look back and see how they were fulfilled in history. So this will be more of history lesson for us but with a spiritual application.

READ Daniel 8:3. The ram symbolizes Persia. It is interesting that the Persian king wore a ram’s head of gold. The ram in this vision has two horns. These two horns do not grow evenly. Even though the one horn came up ahead of the other, in the end it is the second one that grows longer. Verse 20 which we will look at here in a minute explains that this ram represents the Medo-Persian alliance. At first the Medes were in control, but with the coming of Cyrus the Persian in 550 B.C., the balance of power tipped decisively and permanently toward Persia.

READ Daniel 8:4 Notice the three directions the ram moves to conquer, westward toward Babylon, Mesopotamia and Syria; northward toward Colchis, Iberia, Armenia and the regions around the Caspian Sea; and southward seizing Palestine (remember by the time we come to the book of Daniel Israel and Judah have been conquered), Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia. The threefold direction of the ram’s conquests was depicted in the first vision by a bear-like beast with three ribs in its mouth. No country could stand up to the might of the Persian Empire. As we mentioned before, the Persians overwhelmed their enemies by massing huge numbers of soldiers against them and crushing them with a great numerical advantage.

The ram is a force that must be reckoned with for sure, but then Daniel sees a male goat, and we’re talking a really fast goat!

READ Daniel 8:5. The expression, “without touching the ground” indicates that the goat moved quickly, bounding forward in a series of giant leaps. The goat has a rather large horn, referred to as a “conspicuous horn between his eyes.”

READ Daniel 8:20-21.

[Question 4] As mentioned previously the ram with two horns represents the Medo-Persian Empire that would eventually rise and conquer Babylon. The really fast goat represents the Greek Empire. The great horn between the goat’s eyes, its first king is a reference to Alexander the Great.

[Question 5] Here is a map showing the extent of Alexander’s Empire. He conquered a massive territory that extended from Greece to India, down into the African continent and east into the continent of Asia. Contrary to popular opinion, however, he did NOT conquer the entire world! He did conquer a large portion of the known civilized world of his day. So the answer to Question 5 is False.

Time does not permit us to go into a lot of detail about Alexander the Great and his conquests. So let me give you a brief overview of his life. Alexander followed his father Philip of Macedon to power and began to reign in 336 B.C. at the ripe old age of 20. Influenced by the teachings of his boyhood tutor, Aristotle, Alexander believed that all barbarians (non-Greeks) were inferior and that the Greeks should rule over them. He began his conquests by brutally forcing the independent Greek city-states who refused to accept his authority into submission. Successful in this endeavor, soon all Greece stood behind him.

Then Alexander turned his attention to military conquests in Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt (where he founded the city of Alexandria) and then to his arch-enemy, the Persian Empire. He took their prize city of Babylon in a bloody war in 331 B.C. Susa, the royal city, and Persepolis, a holy city, fell a few months later. In his bloody swath of terror, Alexander plundered whole cities, he butchered those who fought against him, and he murdered their kings and subsequently declared himself as king. In 327 B.C. he conquered India. By 324 B.C., with the entire known world firmly in his control, Alexander made plans to set up his capital city at Babylon.

In May of 323 B.C., while attending a function held in the honor of one of his admirals, he became quite intoxicated. At that time someone (historians disagree as to who this was) handed Alexander a cup of very strong wine and within 12 days he died at the age of 33. Three rumors exist as to what happened to Alexander: (1) He was poisoned perhaps by Aristotle or one of his generals, (2) He died of malaria aggravated by his drunkenness, or (3) He died of wounds received in India that were never fully healed.

Few mourned his passing and when he died his empire descended at once into anarchy. When his wife and 13-year old son were murdered in 310 B.C. Alexander was left without any direct descendants.

READ Daniel 8:6-7. In short, Greece under Alexander the Great (the goat, which is the “he” and the “him” referred to in these verses) will conquer Persia, the ram with two horns.

Next we are told of Alexander the Great’s arrogance…

READ Daniel 8:8a – “Then the goat became exceedingly great”

We are also told that his demise would be quick –

READ Daniel 8:8b – “But when he was strong, the great horn was broken.” In other words, no sooner had Alexander conquered the world, became mighty, then he was killed. The horn was broken. We already observed from history that this is exactly what happened.

The last part of verse 8 speaks of the four horns that rise to take his place… READ Daniel 8:8c – “And instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.”

These four horns represent the four generals among whom Alexander divided his kingdom. History tells us that these generals are:

(1) Cassander who was given control of Macedonia and Greece;

(2) Lysimachus who was given Asia Minor and Thrace;

(3) Seleucus who took Syria, upper Asia, Babylon and the east; and

(4) Ptolemy who ruled over Egypt, Palestine and Arabia.

READ Daniel 8:22. This verse makes it clear that none of the four rulers that came after Alexander the Great would have anywhere close to the power that he had. If you notice the map there are actually five separate kingdoms. The big one in the middle was ruled by a former general named Antigonus. When he insisted that their five territories be reunited as one kingdom again those other four generals opposed him and eventually conquered him and split his territory among the four of them. So it looked like this…

READ Daniel 8:9. The “rather small horn, which grew exceedingly great,” is NOT the same little horn that we saw last week in Chapter 7. That little horn, of course, symbolized the antichrist in the last days and arose up in the last days out of the Gentile world and opposed God and His people. No, this person arises out of Ancient Greece and specifically from the Seleucid Empire. This is a real person in history.

We know him as Antiochus IV or Antiochus Epiphanes.

Daniel states that he “grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east and toward the glorious land (beautiful land).”

[Question 6] And so it was that Antiochus Epiphanes’ conquests were south into Egypt; east toward Babylonia and Persia; and toward Israel which at that time was called Palestine. Daniel describes what it is that Antiochus would do that is so devastating to the Jewish people. He came to the throne in 175 B.C. and plundered the Temple in Jerusalem. He desecrated it by offering pig’s flesh on the altar. The prophecy contained here in Daniel Chapter 8 skips over about 130 years of history, but much of this period will be addressed later in Daniel Chapter 11. Verse 9 mentions that he was “a little horn,” which means that he arose from humble beginnings. He was the younger son of Antiochus III whose story is told in Daniel Chapter 11. Not only was he not the heir to the throne, but also he was carried off by the Romans as a hostage and remained in exile in Rome for 14 years. Who would have thought such an individual would eventually become king?

READ Daniel 8:10-12.

[Question 7] This is all poetic language. What Antiochus Epiphanes tried to do was force all the people he conquered to worship the god Zeus. He himself claims to be a human “epiphany” or manifestation of Zeus, the high god of the Greeks. Of course the vast majority of Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon (Ezra and Nehemiah) were cured once and for all of idol worship. They adamantly refused to worship Zeus and firmly resisted. So Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted them unmercifully. These verses describe his desecration of the Temple. “Throwing truth to the ground” is a reference to Antiochus’s attack upon the Holy Scriptures.

It seems that nothing can stop him. History reveals that Antiochus Epiphanes made martyrs of many Jews and his cruelties are terrible. God permits him to prosper, to go unchecked, just as the antichrist at the end times will go three and a half years unrestrained. This must have seemed strange to Daniel. Why would God be silent? Why would God not do anything about these abominations by this evil tyrant? Then, all of a sudden, Daniel hears something…

READ Daniel 8:13-14. Daniel overhears two angels in heaven conversing. One of the angels asks THE question that must have been gnawing at Daniel as he observed all that was happening to the Jews – “How long?” The answer comes at once. A time limit was set of 2,300 evenings (a little more than six years). This coincides with the period from 171 B.C., when Antiochus Epiphanes began his persecution of the Jews, to 165 B.C., when Judas Maccabeus restored the Temple for its proper worship. It’s a pretty straightforward fulfillment of this prophecy.

We are later given some additional details concerning Antiochus Epiphanes and his persecution of the Jews.

READ Daniel 8:23-25. Like the antichrist we have read about in Revelation, Antiochus Epiphanes is a master of deceit (verse 23), a destroyer (verse 24) and one who blasphemes God (verse 25).

One final thought about Antiochus Epiphanes: he meets an abrupt end. The last part of verse 25 tells us, “he will be broken but not by human hand.” In other words he won’t die by human hands such as being killed in battle or murdered. History tells us that the death of Antiochus Epiphanes was sudden and that he died from complications of ulcers and worms. Again, Biblical prophecy is fulfilled.

[Question 8] Opposes God and His people, blasphemer, deceiver, destroyer, has great power and subdues others, rises to power by promising false security, intelligent, persuasive, controlled by Satan, subjugates Israel to his authority, rule is quickly terminated by divine judgment

READ Daniel 8:26. Gabriel tells Daniel that what he has seen is true. Even though to Daniel the events are a long way off in the future, some 200-400 years, from heaven’s perspective the events have already taken place. Daniel is told to keep what he had been shown to himself. Why? Because there was no way that the full importance or significance of all the events he had been shown could be understood by the Jews of his day. It wasn’t for them to know. Like all future events, cloaked in a fog of mystery, in time they become clearer.

Daniel grasps the importance of what he saw. Look at the last verse.

READ Daniel 8:27. Daniel is exhausted and overcome by the ordeal of seeing this terrible vision. As a result he becomes quite ill for several days. These new revelations concerning the future sufferings of his people deeply upset him, as you might imagine.

One commentary I read suggested that what bothers Daniel is that he has this good understanding of Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s prophecies. They have predicted that God’s people will return to their land and that the Messiah will come and will rule His people. Daniel like many of the Jews is optimistic. And yet here in this vision Daniel is shown awful images of how the Jewish people will continue to be mistreated. The truth is that until Jesus Christ returns in Revelation 19, the persecution of God’s covenant people the Jews and those who follow the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, Jesus will continue to be persecuted and killed by godless people. There’s a headline that’s been ripped right out of today’s newspaper.Proverbs 3:21-26