

9. THE RAM & THE HE-GOAT

DANIEL 8:1-27

¹In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, I, Daniel, was granted a vision. This vision was after the first one. ²In the vision I was looking and saw myself in the fortified city Susa, in the province of Elam, and I was by the canal Ulai.

³I looked up and saw a ram standing by the canal. It had two long horns; one was longer than the other and appeared after it. ⁴I saw the ram charging east, west, north and south. All beasts were powerless to withstand it, and no one could rescue from its power; it did as it pleased and became strong.

⁵As I was watching, a he-goat appeared from the west, coming across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground. The goat had a horn on its forehead. ⁶It came toward the ram with the two horns that I had seen standing before the gateway, and it ran at it with savage force. ⁷I saw it approaching the ram. It was enraged against it and struck the ram, breaking off its two horns. The ram did not have power to withstand it. It knocked the ram down to the ground and trampled upon it, and there was no one who could rescue the ram from its power.

⁸Then the male goat grew exceedingly great; but at the height of its power, the great horn was broken, and in its place there came up four prominent horns toward the four winds of heaven.

Chapters 8-12, like the Introduction (1:1 - 2:4), are in Hebrew (see page 88). The vision of the ram and the he-goat appears to have been composed after the desecration of the temple in December 167. Verse 1 places this vision two years after the 'first one' (see 7:1), and the author of this 'vision' is clearly familiar with chapter 7. Elam lies between Babylon and Persia, north of the Persian Gulf.

The ram with the two horns (verses 3-4) symbolises the kingdom of Media and Persia (considered together also in Daniel 6:9, 13; Esther 1:3; 2:14; see Daniel 8:20-21). The longer (more powerful) horn is the kingdom of Persia. The kingdom spreads out in all directions ('east' is supplied from the Old Greek Version).

The he-goat (verses 5-8) symbolises the Macedonian kingdom of Alexander the Great (the 'great horn'; see also verses 8, and 21).

The Hebrew 'he-goat', שָׁפִיר [šepîr] is a loan word from Aramaic. There are a number of Aramaisms in the Hebrew of this chapter. Some scholars suggest that we have a translation into Hebrew of a text that was originally in Aramaic. This may be so, or it may be that we are witnessing the influence of Aramaic on the Hebrew language.

The death of Alexander is represented here by the breaking of the great horn (verse 8). Alexander's kingdom broke into four parts (verse 8): Macedonia, Thrace, Egypt and Syria.

The small horn is clearly Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who invaded Egypt in 169 and 168. 'The beautiful land' is Palestine (compare Jeremiah 3:19; Ezekiel 20:6).

In regard to Antiochus's aspirations to challenge the heavens see Isaiah 14:12-15. The 'stars' are the visible array. The 'host' are also invisible (angelic).

'The prince of the host' (verse 11) is God. The following text offers a good commentary on verse 11:

The king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

— 1 Maccabees 1:41-50

Verse 12 reflects 7:25. What is happening on earth during the persecutions reflects what is happening in the world of the spirits.

In verse 13 the 'holy ones' who are discussing the wickedness of Antiochus's actions in the temple appear to be celestial beings of the heavenly host (compare 7:16). They envisage the defiling of the sanctuary as lasting 1,150 days (2,300 evening sacrifices and morning sacrifices, verse 14), about 50 days over three years. This is short of the three and a half years given in 7:25 (and repeated in 12:7). The persecution was already under way.

⁹Out of one of them came another horn, a little one, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the beautiful land.

¹⁰It grew as high as the host of heaven. It threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them.

¹¹Even against the prince of the host it acted arrogantly; it took the regular burnt offering away from him and defiled the sanctuary.

¹²In the course of its wickedness, the host was given over to it together with the regular burnt offering; it cast truth to the ground, and kept prospering in what it did.

¹³Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, "For how long is this vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled?"

¹⁴And he answered him, "For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be purified."

¹⁵While I, Daniel, was seeking to understand the vision I had seen, someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man,

¹⁶and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, "Gabriel, help this man understand the vision."

¹⁷So he came near where I stood; and as he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, "Understand, O man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

¹⁸As he was speaking to me, I fell into a trance, face to the ground; then he touched me and set me on my feet.

¹⁹He said, "Listen, and I will tell you what will take place later in the period of wrath; for it refers to the appointed time of the end.

²⁰As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹The he-goat is the kingdoms of the Greeks, and the great horn between its eyes is the first kingdom.

²²As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. ³At the end of their rule, when the transgressions have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance will arise, skilled in intrigue. ²⁴He will grow strong in power, will cause fearful destruction, and will succeed in what he does. He will destroy powerful people, ²⁵and his plotting will be directed against holy ones. Deceit will prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall be great. Without warning he will destroy many and will even rise up against the Prince of princes.

He will be broken, and not by human hands.

The Hebrew for 'man' in verse 15 [גִּבּוֹר , geber] is picked up in the name 'Gabriel' (verse 16 – the geber of 'El).

'Man' in verse 17 is the usual בֶּן־אָדָם [ben 'ādām, 'son of humanity', 'human being'] - the Hebrew equivalent of the Aramaic 'human' [בַּר אֱנוֹשׁ, bar'enoš] who appeared with the clouds in 7:3.

The reference in verse 17 and 19 to the end time recalls Habakkuk:

There is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

– Habakkuk 2:3

The end that the author has in mind here is the end of the persecution and the coming of the kingdom of the faithful Jews. The sinful gentile ruler will then experience divine 'wrath' (verse 19).

Verses 20-25 make explicit the interpretation of the symbolic vision (verses 2-14).

The final sentence of verse 25 hints at the author's disapproval of the tactics of the Maccabees. The breaking of the power of Antiochus is something only God can achieve. The persecuted are to remain faithful, not try to take things into their own hands.

Verse 26 speaks of the reliability of revelation (see also Daniel 10:1; 11:2; and in the Newer Testament, Revelation 19:9; 21:5; 22:6). It continues the literary device of writing about current events as though they were foreseen many years before and revealed to Daniel. The effect of this is to help the readers remember that it is their God who is in ultimate control, not the perpetrators of evil. The revelations are to be kept secret till the time of the persecution under Antiochus - which was the time when they were actually composed.

As verse 27 insists, how could Daniel possibly comprehend things that would not happen till over 350 years in the future!

²⁶The vision of the evening and the morning that has been told is true. As for you, seal up the vision, for it refers to the distant future."

²⁷I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I arose and went about the king's business. But I was dismayed by the vision and did not understand it.

