

Daniel 8

A Study Of Daniel 8

Daniel 8 concerns a vision that Daniel is given. When we consider Daniel's visions, we must remember, (somewhat stating the obvious), that all the visions elaborate and expound on his initial vision of Daniel 2 (expanded upon in Daniel 7) of the statue representing the Beast Empires. So, in Daniel 8, his vision concerns the transition from the second empire represented by the silver chest and arms, the Medo-Persian empire, to the third empire, the Greek empire, represented by the copper middle and thighs. The vision itself concerns a ram and a goat. The goat overpowers the ram, and then its great horn is shattered, leading to four horns arising, out of which eventually comes another small horn. This small horn in turn grows until eventually it reaches to heaven. The Angel Gabriel helps Daniel to understand the vision. The vision encompasses the period of history from the fall of the Medo-Persian empire to Alexander The Great, the Macedonian general, up until a very specific event, the Abomination of Desolation.

Verses 1-8:

The goat overcomes the ram; (Greece deposes Medo-Persia as the World's leading empire).

The great horn is broken and four horns arise; (Alexander The Great dies at the height of his powers, and the Greek empire splits into four warring factions - Seleucid, Ptolomaic, Antigonian and Thracian Greece).

Verses 9-12:

A small horn arises from one of the four regions, and it is militarily engaged in the South, the East and the Pleasant Land. It grows up to the stars, some of which it throws down. It acts arrogantly against the Prince of Heaven, and takes away the sacrifice and overthrows the sanctuary; (Antiochus Epiphanes arises out of the fractured Greek Empire, emerging in Seleucid Greece, and his main military campaigns are in Egypt, (the South), against the Parthians, (the East), and in Judea ['Judah is my pleasant vineyard']. In Jerusalem he wages war with the Hebrew religion, abolishing the daily sacrifice and profaning the sanctuary with a statue of Zeus).

Verses 13-14:

A voice declares the period of wrath and attrition involving the desecration of the sanctuary to be 2300 mornings and evenings

Verses 18-22:

The Angel Gabriel explains the vision to Daniel.

Verses 23-25:

The Angel Gabriel depicts the end of the rule of the fractured Greek Empire, culminating with the rise of an evil leader.

Verses 26-27:

The vision makes Daniel sick, and he cannot understand it, and he is told to seal it up as it pertains to a time in the somewhat distant future.

So the vision describes the transition from the Medo-Persian empire to the Greek empire, subsequent infighting within the Greek empire culminating in the rise of a leader who will impose the so-called Abomination of Desolation on the Jews. We see a sweep of history from Alexander the Great defeating Darius the Third of Persia at the battle of Guagemela in 331BC, Alexander's death in 323BC, the fracturing of the Greek empire into the Seleucids, Thracians, Ptolomeans and Antigonians, and a period of internal war and jockeying for power up unto the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes, who became King of Seleucid Greece in 175BC and died in 163BC.

Having established the general scope of the vision, let us now examine its salient features.

The first thing to notice about the vision is that Daniel has skipped any significant information on the Medo-Persian empire, and jumped forward to the Greek empire, indicating that it has some greater significance.

Secondly, we notice that the Greek empire is depicted as being airborne. The goat hovers across the earth, and the small horn reaches to the host of heaven - literally the stars, figuratively the priests of Israel. This aerial, as opposed to earthbound, quality indicates that the Greek empire has a particular spiritual dimension, bearing in mind that Satan is called the Prince of the Powers of the Air.

Thirdly, the main focus of the vision is the little horn, Antiochus Epiphanes, and his actions in Jerusalem.

Fourthly, the vision delineates a certain time frame in regard to both the Greek empire and also to the Jews.

Fifthly, the vision is placed out of sequence in the Book of Daniel, insofar as it comes before Daniel's 70 weeks in Chapter 9, notwithstanding that Daniel's 70 weeks start well before the fall of the Medo-Persian empire, (538BC as opposed to 331BC). Moreover, in chapters 10-12, Daniel recapitulates much of the information of Chapter 8, however chapters 10-12 are placed in their rightful place to reflect the historical chronology of events.

Whilst the Babylonian empire secedes to the Medo-Persian empire in one night, and likewise the Medo-Persian empire secedes to the Greek empire in a swift and unequivocal transition of power, the transition from the Greek empire (the middle and thighs of copper) to the Roman empire (the legs of iron) was considerably more gradual and less well-defined. There is no clear point in history where one empire dethroned the other, as both co-existed for a portion of time. The Greek and Roman empires had different spheres of influence, as the Roman empire sprang up in the Mediterranean and Europe, whilst the Greek empire was still in effect in the Middle East. One proposed date for a transfer of authority is 146BC at the battle of Corinth, where the Romans overcame the Greek city-state of Corinth, but it was not really a definitive transfer of power, and the Bible does not accord it that status either.

Chapter 8 of Daniel does however give us a precise starting point and end point. It starts in the era of the Medo-Persian empire, and then establishes the war between Greece and Medo-Persia as the first significant event on the timeline. We already know that the Medo-Persian empire overthrows Babylon (in 538BC) from the previous visions, so now this vision takes us up to the next significant point, 331BC, when Greece eclipses Medo-Persia. The vision then fills in the details of the Greek empire with broad brushstrokes, taking us up to the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes. In effect, this vision is describing the whole period of suzerainty of the Greek empire over Judea. In Chapter 11 of Daniel, we are furnished with greater detail about these events, so Chapter 8 serves a specific purpose, as it is not merely a redundant general introduction. The primary point then of Chapter 8 is to create clear date markers which are of great significance. This date being marked revolves around a very specific event, the Abomination of Desolation.

The Abomination itself occurred when Antiochus Epiphanes, who believed himself to be the living incarnation of Zeus, entered Jerusalem and desecrated the sanctuary and abolished the sacrifices in the temple. The desecration of the sanctuary involved the setting up a statue of Zeus to be worshipped, possibly in the Holy of Holies. The Books of the Maccabees, as well as the historian Josephus, extensively document the events in Jerusalem which occurred when Antiochus came in. It was an extremely violent and oppressive time, with the death penalty being imposed on Torah observant Jews. The key things we need to be aware of from a prophetic standpoint are that at a certain point Antiochus abolished the Levitical sacrificial system and desecrated the sanctuary by placing a statue of Zeus there. It is also important to understand, as we have already discussed in regards to Daniel's 70 weeks, that the reaction to Antiochus by the Maccabees was a wholesale rebellion against Greek rule by the Jewish people. This is important to understand, as Daniel's 70 weeks are specifically a 490 year period of the 'wooden yoke' for Judah and Jerusalem, that is to say, of foreign occupation and rule. By rebelling against the Greeks and rejecting their rule, The

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Kingdom of Judea temporarily threw off the wooden yoke of subjugation. The significance of the Abomination of Desolation cannot be underestimated, as it was the flagrant desecration of the temple by Antiochus that stoked the anger and rebellion that flared up when Mattathias of The Maccabees rose against Antiochus. (From the Jewish Virtual Library):

When a Greek official tried to force a priest named Mattathias to make a sacrifice to a pagan god, the Jew murdered the man. Predictably, Antiochus began reprisals, but in 167 BCE the Jews rose up behind Mattathias and his five sons and fought for their liberation.

As we have already mentioned, the transitions from Babylonian to Medo-Persian and Medo-Persian to Greek empires are clearly demarcated, both in history and prophetically, but there is no such clear cut event in history to indicate the transfer from Greek to Roman empire. However, Daniel 8 gives us the demarcation lines. First of all the holy one tells the other holy one that the duration of the Abomination is 2300 evenings and mornings. There were two daily sacrifices, a morning and an evening one, so the duration of Antiochus' desecration of the temple and ban on the Levitical sacrificial system has a precise duration. What the holy one is in fact telling us is that 2300 sacrifices will not be administered at the Temple, which clearly means that the Abomination will last 1150 days**. (The division factor of 2 here is important, and will come into play again later). 1150 days is 3 years 54 days on the 365 day solar calendar, 3 years 70 days on the prophetic 360 day calendar, and 3 years and 87 days on the lunar calendar. In our terms, it is three years and just under two months. The relevance of the 3 year 2 month Abomination is that it serves as a bookmark on the biblical prophetic timeline. In fact we can go further than that, and say that it marks the end of the period of the Greek empire, the middle and thighs of copper (bronze).

Gabriel tells Daniel:

“(v17) Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end (eth qets).....(v19) Listen, and I will tell you what will take place later (acariyth)*, in the period of wrath (za'am); for it refers to the appointed time of the end (mowed qets).” (I have inserted the comma after later, to clarify the precise meaning here.)

In verse 26 Gabriel tells Daniel that:

“The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true”

Now, if we cross reference that with verse 17, we get:

“The vision of the evenings and the mornings is for the time of the end”

The period of wrath is the 2300 evenings and mornings - the 1150 days of the Abomination, which are themselves a punishment for wickedness (v12) and transgression (v23). So the 1150 days of the Abomination refer to the appointed time of the end. Not only this, but the entire vision according

to Gabriel is for the time of the end. So the purpose of the entire vision is to demarcate an endpoint. 'Qets' means an end, extremity, or border, so 'eth qets', 'time of the end', means a temporal endpoint, a temporal full stop. The whole vision is thus referring to the end of something, and the end in question is the end of Jewish subjugation under Grecian colonial rule. We could go further and say it refers to the end of the Greek empire, but that is an unnecessary distinction we do not need to make. The vision simply demarcates, categorically and unequivocally, the end of the period of Jewish subjugation to Greek rule. The event that defines the end of this period is the Abomination of Desolation as inflicted on Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes.

So, to summarise Gabriel:

“The Abomination of Desolation is for the time of the end.....it is the reference point for the appointed time of the end”

Regarding when exactly the Abomination began, 1 Maccabees 1 tells us 25th of Kislev 145, which equates to late 167BC on the Julian calendar.

54 Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, 55 and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets 59 On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering.

1 Maccabees 6 tells us that the Abomination was torn down, and Antiochus fell ill and died, in the year one hundred and forty nine, which equates to 163BC on the Julian calendar.

The 1150 days of the Abomination equate to 3 years and 87 days, according to the lunar calendar operated by the Hebrews. As Kislev normally falls in November/December, we can take a rough median date of late December for Kislev 25. So the 3 years and 87 days of the Abomination can be seen to run from late December 167BC through 166, 165 and 164BC, and terminate sometime around March 163BC. Although we have not got precise dates to corroborate this, the overall fit, based on what records Maccabees affords us, is correct, and fulfils the prophetic calendar of Daniel 8 exactly.

Jerusalem was captured in June/July 63BC by Pompey The Great, bringing Judea into Rome's orbit as a client state, and ending the period of Jewish independence. From 63BC to the end of the Abomination is just over 100 years, and from 63BC to the start of the Abomination in December 167BC is 103 years and approximately 6 months.

In my study of Daniel's 70 weeks I have deduced that there is a 103 year hiatus in the Jewish 490 year wooden yoke period, a time I have attributed to the period of Hasmonean independence, from 166BC to 63BC, as recorded by the Jewish Encyclopedia. The 103 year hiatus is a necessity, in

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order to make sense of the 490 years. Here now in Daniel 8 we find supporting evidence that endorses and corroborates the 103 year hiatus as a prophetic reality.

We have noted that Daniel 8 sits somewhat strangely in the Book of Daniel, insofar that it precedes Daniel 9, which depicts events prior to the events of Daniel 8. However, when we properly understand Daniel 8 and its critical function as a date marker, we see why it necessarily precedes Daniel 9, because although we can in theory (as I did myself) deduce the 103 year hiatus in Daniel's 70 weeks without understanding Daniel 8, in practice, most people fail to pick this up and bludgeon Daniel's 70 weeks into ending in AD 33 or thereabouts. However, if we correctly understand Daniel 8, we can then proceed to Daniel 9 with the right key to unlock the meaning of the 70 weeks.

* 'Achariyth' literally means something prophetically in the future, a later or last stage of something.

**I have added this as a footnote, rather than reference, because I have found it after writing the study. It explains the 1150 days very well.

<http://www.moellerhaus.com/2300.htm>