

# Daniel Chapter Eight

This chapter returns to *Hebrew* (from Aramaic) in the original text because Daniel 8-12 charts the times of the Gentiles as they particularly affect **Israel**. *Hamilton Smith: everything that concerns God's earthly people, whether in the past or future, is of the deepest importance to God, for in and through this people the glory of Christ on earth will at last be maintained, and all the counsels of God for the blessing of the nations be fulfilled.* The vision of Daniel 7 has given the panorama; Daniel 8 now focusses on the *second* (ram of Medo-Persia) and *third* world empires (goat of Greece).

This is a chapter of horns. **1.** A *ram* with 'two horns' (v.3). **2.** A 'notable' (v.5) or 'great' horn (v.8). **3.** A 'little horn' (v.9) or 'king of fierce countenance' (v.23). The ram represents Medo-Persia, whilst the great horn symbolises the first king of the Greek empire, Alexander the Great. The 'little horn' of this chapter arises from one of the four-fold divisions of the **Greek** empire and is readily identified as the *historical* Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes. The 'little horn' of 7.8 is not the same person. He springs from the fourth, **Roman** beast and represents the *future* man of sin, ruler of the final Gentile world empire. Undoubtedly, the historical details of Daniel 8, especially those of Antiochus, are typical and anticipatory of the final world empire and its Satanically energised ruler. To put it simply, the little horn of the third kingdom serves as a prototype of the little horn of the fourth kingdom (Archer).

## The Introduction of the Scene [vv.1-2]

**v.1:** This vision follows two years after the vision of Daniel 7. It is the 'third' year of Belshazzar's reign (551BC). The date is significant. It has been nine years since Nebuchadnezzar's death, resulting in widespread political instability in the empire. *Nabonidus* has left his son *Belshazzar* in Babylon to deal with Median insurrection in Arabia. Ominously, *Cyrus* the Persian is about to defeat *Astyages* to unite the kingdoms of Media and Persia into one formidable power which would be the downfall of the Babylonian empire in as little as twelve years. 'I, Daniel' is emphatic and suggests he felt honoured to receive such revelation. **v.2:** The *location* of the vision is also significant. Whilst physically in Babylon, Daniel was seemingly transported in his vision to the 'palace' in 'Shushan' (Susa), cp. Ezekiel 8.1-3; Revelation 17.3. Susa was one of the Persian royal cities, located approximately 225 miles east of Babylon. Whilst the city was part of the Babylonian empire, it did not rise to significance until the Darius I (522-486BC) made it the 'palace' (citadel) capital city of the province of Elam. It also functioned as the Persia's diplomatic and administrative centre as well as a winter residence for the royal family. In Daniel's day it must have had limited significance, but this vision is concerned with the rise and fall of Persia and beyond. It was in Shushan that Esther was made queen, and the city from which Nehemiah returned to build the walls at Jerusalem (Esther 1.2; Nehemiah 1.1). The river (canal) *Ulai* is best identified with an artificial canal to the northeast of the city. From here Daniel had a panoramic view.

## The Imagery of the Ram and Goat [vv.3-8]

**v.3:** The 'ram' with its two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia (v.20). Persian kings often carried a ram's head into battle or represented a ram on their armour as the guardian spirit of the empire. One horn (Persia) was seen to be higher than the other, though coming up later. Cyrus was crowned king over a small Persian province in c.557BC. At this time, the Medes were a major world power yet by the year 550BC Cyrus had taken over the whole Median empire and united it with Persia. The Medo-Persian empire was eventually dominated by a long line of Persian kings, and subsequently became simply known as the Persian empire – hence one horn 'higher than the other'. **v.4:** The ram 'pushed' (butted with hostility) west (Syria, Asia Minor), north (Armenia, Caspian Sea) and south (Egypt, Ethiopia) – three directions that may relate to the three ribs in the mouth of the bear (7.5). There were no major military conquests to the east – these lands already belonged to Media. Medo-Persia thus became 'great', a word used six times in the chapter of various empires or individuals. The word can be used *positively* (Psalm 126.2) or *negatively*, as here, describing deliberate pride, arrogance and self-confidence.



**v.5:** The ‘rough (hairy) goat’ represents Greece (v.21). In the ancient world, the zodiac sign of Capricorn (horned male goat) was a symbol of Greece. Goats have two horns, but not this goat! There was a single ‘notable’ (conspicuous) or ‘great’ (large) horn representing the ‘first king’ of Greece, i.e. Alexander the Great. He was born in 356BC, the son of the great warrior Philip of Macedon. He was educated under Aristotle and became king in 336BC. Two years later he marshalled an army and marched from the west on a vendetta against Persia. He never returned home as he ‘touched not the ground’, illustrating the speed with which he conquered the known world in merely twelve years. **v.6:** Alexander moved against Persia in the ‘fury of his power’, i.e. with white-hot burning anger and a ‘fit of rage’ (cholera, v.7). The Greeks were long embittered against the Persians since both Darius I (522-486BC) and his son Xerxes (486-465BC) had made military assaults on Greece, even looting and destroying Athens. **v.7:** In 334BC Alexander began his conquest of the entire Persian empire in a series of four major conquests, first meeting and defeating the Persians as he crossed the Hellespont (Dardanelles) and routed the army of Darius III at the Battle of Granicus River. *Allen: Ancient capitals fell before him – Ecbatana, Persepolis, Babylon, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Memphis (Egypt), until the final battle with a Persian army was the Battle of Issus, in November 333BC.* The ram had ‘no power’ to ‘stand before’ Alexander – the Persians were in constant flight, cast ‘to the ground’ and ‘stamped upon’ until their ultimate defeat at Gaugamela near Nineveh in 331BC. Darius III fled in retreat and was finally killed in 330BC as he was literally ‘thrown to the ground’ and fatally wounded by the javelins of two of his own officials. **v.8:** Consequently, Alexander became ‘very great’ (more arrogant), claiming deity and the worship of his troops. Yet, when he was ‘strong’ he was suddenly ‘broken’. Conspiracy theories abound, ranging from poisoning to malaria, but after a high fever and drunken orgy at Babylon, Alexander the Great died in 323BC at 32 years of age. *Walvoord: Alexander, who had conquered more of the world than any previous ruler, was not able to conquer himself.* Consequently, four ‘notable’ horns sprang up in his place, but ‘not in his power’ (v.22), i.e. far less mighty. The four horns symbolise the four kingdoms (cf. v.22) into which Alexander’s empire was divided. His young sons were murdered after his death and eventually, 22 years later, the empire divided between his generals: Cassander (Macedonia and Greece), Lysimachus (Thrace and Lydia), Seleucus (Syria and Babylonia) and Ptolemy (Egypt and Palestine). There was a fifth general, Antigonus, who at the very last was murdered. *MacArthur: If Antigonus had gotten in there, you could take your Bible and put it away because it would’ve been wrong... But it wasn’t.*



### The Irreverence of the Little Horn [vv.9-12]

**v.9:** From ‘one of them’, i.e. the four divisions of Alexander’s Greek empire came forth a ‘little horn’ (the sixth associated with the Greek empire). The individual in view is likely *Antiochus IV Epiphanes* (175-164BC), a descendant of Seleucus I and the eighth ruler of the Seleucid dynasty based in Syria. Again, he began insignificantly (with no rightful claim to the throne) but ‘waxed exceeding great’ (or arrogant), his kingdom being located in the east (Syria) and campaigning towards and invading the south (Egypt) and ‘pleasant (beautiful) land’, literally ‘ornament of the earth’ (JND) or ‘the glory of gems’ (Bullinger). This is scriptural language for the land of Israel (cf. Daniel 11.16; Jeremiah 3.19; Ezekiel 20.6) – it was a place of *honour* because God had chosen to place His name there. **v.10:** Antiochus even arrogantly fought against and ‘trampled on’ the host (stars) of heaven. The word ‘host’ is used in relation to *angels* (Psalm 148.2), the sun, moon and stars in the *heavens* (Deuteronomy 4.19) and *human* armies (Genesis 21.22). But the stars of heaven here are likely figurative of the people of God (Jews) – those who own the rule of heaven and testify faithfully in dark days – cf. v.24; 12.3; Genesis 15.5; 22.17; Exodus 12.41. Some of this host were ‘cast down’ and ‘stamped upon’, i.e. severely persecuted and even martyred. One such occasion occurred in 167BC. *“Apollonius, his chief tax collector, was dispatched with 22,000 men and attacked Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Most of the male population was killed and the women and children enslaved; those few who could left the city. The city walls were demolished and the old city of David refortified and furnished with a military garrison. There followed the prohibition of all Jewish rites and the rededication of the high temple to Olympian Zeus. A monthly check was made, and anyone found with a copy of the Book of the Law or a child who had been circumcised was put to death”* (Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary). **v.11:** ‘Prince of the host’ is likely a reference to God (cf. Joshua 5.14; but cp. 10.20-21) and thus Antiochus magnified himself ‘to’, or ‘on equality’ with Jehovah. Whilst this is certainly true (he minted coins with the inscription *Theos Epiphanes*, i.e. God manifest), the phrase could alternatively mean he exalted himself to the position of ‘prince’ (ruler) of the Jews. He also removed the ‘daily sacrifice’ (continual burnt offering) ‘from Him’ (RV), i.e. the Prince, thus robbing God of the worship of His people. The place of ‘his sanctuary’ (i.e. the temple in Jerusalem) was ‘cast down’ (abandoned) in the sense that it was desecrated beyond use. This began in 169BC when Antiochus entered the Holy of

Holies and plundered the temple (1 Maccabees 1.20-24) and further on December 25, 167BC when he sacrificed a pig to Zeus on the brazen altar and sprinkled its blood over the temple courts (1 Maccabees 1.54-61). **v.12:** The ‘host’ of the people of Israel and the ‘daily sacrifice’ were sovereignly given over to the oppression and authority of Antiochus in the course of his sinful rebellion (transgression) against God (cf. v.13). Although, it is possible the ‘transgression’ refers to that of the Jewish people, many of whom adopted the idolatrous reforms of Antiochus thus explaining the Divine chastening upon them. Antiochus cast ‘truth to the ground’, defying the word of God, even tearing to pieces and burning any books of the law that were found. Those in possession of Scripture were condemned to death (1 Maccabees 1.56-57). He seemed to enjoy success (prosper) in everything he did.

### The Illumination of the Angel [vv.13-14]

**v.13:** The word ‘saint’ simply means ‘holy one’ and suggests Daniel was party to an angelic conversation (cf. 4.13; Deuteronomy 33.2). Their concern was the *duration* of the removal of the daily sacrifice, desecration of the sanctuary and persecution of the saints. **v.14:** It would be ‘two thousand three hundred days’ until the cleansing of the sanctuary. The Hebrew text is literally ‘until evening-morning 2,300’ referring to 2,300 literal 24-hour days. History describes the famous revolt of the Maccabean Jews against the regime of Antiochus, the temple in Jerusalem finally being ‘restored’ to the worship of Jehovah on 25 December, 164BC. This event gave rise to the Jewish feast of Hanukkah. Counting back, the 2,300 days thus began in late 170BC, the very time *Onias III*, a godly high priest, was replaced and eventually murdered by wicked *Menelaus*. To secure his position he bribed Antiochus and stole golden vessels from the temple in order to pay his due. This could mark the beginning of the period of desecration outlined by Daniel.

Reference	Seleucid Date	Julian Date	Event	
1 Macc. 1:10-11	137 <sup>th</sup> year	175 BC	Antiochus Crowned	First Hellenists appear in Jerusalem
	138	174 BC	Jason as high priest	
	139	173 BC		
	140	172 BC		
1 Macc. 1:14-15	141	171 BC	Building of Greek Gymnasium	
1 Macc. 1:15	142	170 BC	Made themselves uncircumcised and forsook the holy covenant	Menelaus high priest +114 days
1 Macc. 1:20	143 <sup>rd</sup> year	169 BC	Enters sanctuary on return from Egypt	+ [365 days + 1]
	144	168 BC		+ [365 days]
1 Macc. 1:54	145 <sup>th</sup> year	167 BC	Abomination on altar	+ [365 days]
	146	166 BC		+ [365 days + 1]
	147	165 BC		+ [365 days]
1 Macc. 4:52	148 <sup>th</sup> 20 <sup>th</sup> <i>Chislev</i>	164BC Dec. 25	Sanctuary cleansed	+ [359 days]
<b>Total</b>				<b>2,300 Days</b>

### The Interpretation of Gabriel [vv.15-26]

**v.15:** Daniel had a clear spiritual exercise in relation to the vision – he ‘sought for the meaning’. So should our attitude ever be the same in relation to scripture. Standing before Daniel was one who had the appearance of a ‘man’ (*geber*) – a Hebrew word which means ‘strong man’. This is likely the angel Gabriel appearing in the form of a man – after all, *geber* joined with *El* forms his name (i.e. strong one of God). **v.16:** A ‘man’s voice’, likely the voice of God Himself, commands Gabriel to respond to the spiritual exercise of his devoted servant and interpret the vision. Gabriel appears to be God’s official publicity man. He makes several important announcements in relation to the Lord Jesus, presenting Him as Sovereign (8.25), Messiah (9.25), Lord (Luke 1.17), Saviour and Son (Luke 1.31-32). **v.17:** Gripped by terror and filled with reverential fear, Daniel falls on his face before Gabriel. ‘Son of man’ stresses Daniel’s human weakness and natural inability to understand what must be spiritually discerned (revealed). The vision concerns ‘the time of the end’ and ‘last end of the indignation’ (wrath), v.19. These statements always refer to the consummation of God’s dealings with mankind, i.e. the end of the times of the Gentiles (cf. Daniel 12.1-2). This is therefore an example of a prophetic passage that has both a *near* and *far* fulfilment. It reads equally true of both the little horn of the Grecian empire (Antiochus) and the little horn of the final, fourth world empire (Antichrist). **v.18:** Daniel was in a coma-like state on his face (cf. Genesis 2.21; Jonah 1.5) until Gabriel caused him to ‘stand’.

**v.19:** The ‘*latter* time of wrath’ refers to God’s chastening of His disobedient people Israel (11.36) during the same basic period of the times of the Gentiles. The *former* period of wrath includes the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The *latter* portion embraces the persecution of Antiochus and the Tribulation. [For notes on vv.20-22 see above]. **v.23:** The ‘*latter* time of their kingdom’ clearly refers to the late stages of the Greek empire (v.22), during which Antiochus reigned – Rome’s dominion over the four divisions of the Greek empire began gradually with the fall of Macedonia in 168BC and was completed with the subjugation of Egypt in 30BC. **But**, this is another example of language suggesting both a *far* as well as a *near* fulfilment because the statement could also refer to the period *beyond* Grecian rule, and therefore have reference to the time of the Tribulation. So, Wycliffe translated this statement ‘and *after* the reign of them’.

The Tribulation is a time when ‘transgressors’ have filled up their measure of sin – the iniquity of Jews and Gentiles is now full and ripe for judgment (cf. Genesis 15.16). At this time, a ‘king of fierce (stern) countenance’ will ‘stand up’ (arise). The demeanour and personality of this king will be unyielding. He will be harsh and merciless towards any who

stand in opposition against him. He will be a man of great intellect, understanding 'dark sentences' (riddles) – probably suggesting he is a great problem solver (cf. 5.12; 1 Kings 10.1; Judges 14.12) and master of political intrigue (double-dealing). **v.24:** He will be mighty in power, but as one energised from without by the devil. He will cause terrible destruction as he sets about his business of world domination. Anyone who stands in his way, even the saints, will be destroyed. **v.25:** His success will be based on cunning, treachery and deceit. As Cyrus, Alexander and Antiochus before him he will exalt himself in arrogant pride, and even 'destroy many' with a covenant of false peace and security which will be disastrously shattered at the mid-point of the tribulation (cf. Isaiah 28.15; Daniel 9.27; Revelation 6.2). He will even seek to attack the 'Prince of princes' – surely the same person as the 'King of kings' and 'Lord of lords'. Yet he will be 'broken without hand', i.e. supernaturally and without human power by the returning Christ from heaven. Divine intervention will remove this man directly to the lake of fire (Revelation 19.20). **v.26:** Daniel had been occupied with the vision for the whole day, even from 'evening' to 'morning'. The revelation he had received was dependable (true) and must be 'shut up', i.e. preserved for generations to come as it concerned 'many days' in the future. It was not that Daniel was to keep the vision a secret but record and seal up the revelation in writing that generations in the distant future might read and understand.

#### The Impact of the Vision [v.27]

**v.27:** Unsurprisingly, Daniel 'fainted' and was 'sick'. There is a *physical* price to be paid for such spiritual revelation. Perhaps the pain and sorrow of the forthcoming suffering of his people was overwhelming. The vision was the cause of 'astonishment' – even revulsion and confusion. And yet, it wasn't long before Daniel was again engaged in official government business, though evidently not work that brought him into close contact with Belshazzar (cf. 5.13-14). Does the word of God so affect us as we read of the imminent, eternal judgment of lost sinners? Does it search our hearts as its mirror reveals our moral imperfections?