

Daniel 8

The Eastern Little Horn

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The Vision of the Ram and the He-Goat

The vision of the eighth chapter of Daniel is one of great importance. The second and third world-empires are brought before us, the Persian and the Macedonian; and the holy land, with the Jews, is introduced more particularly. The Babylonian empire is past: God had already used it to chasten and captivate His people. Now the empires of Persia and of Greece, which were to follow, are specially indicated in their relation to Israel. We have the ram with two horns, the higher one coming up last (answering to the Medo-Persian empire under Cyrus and his successors), and the he-goat with a notable horn between his eyes (answering to the Macedonian or Greek empire under Alexander the Great), smiting the ram and breaking his two horns, and becoming very great.

But the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. This foretold the break-up of Alexander's empire after his early death without surviving heirs, into the four kingdoms of the Diadochi. Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. This is the peculiarity of Dan. 8: one horn is selected out of four -- not the western or Roman power, which is the great subject of Dan. 7, but the northern and eastern power, as it affected Israel especially. It was the Syrian kingdom, the Seleucid, which pressed most heavily on the Jews and their land.

The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up {Dan. 8:20-23}.

Antiochus Epiphanes and the Latter-Day Antitype

There is a notorious person in Jewish and Syrian history who is mainly, though not exclusively, intended here; namely, Antiochus Epiphanes, the eighth king of the Syrian power, who reigned from about B.C. 175 to 164. He was the great enemy and persecutor of the Jewish people and their religion, answering historically with great precision to the description here given. He took away the daily sacrifice, cast down the sanctuary, transgressed, and cast the truth to the ground. He defiled the temple, set up the abomination of desolation on the altar of burnt offering, and endeavored to extirpate Judaism. Thus we have a most remarkable and precise fulfilment of part of this prophecy in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes.

But it is one of the most instructive principles of prophetic interpretation that a prediction may have a double fulfilment -- a partial, historical, and near one; and a complete, still future, and final one. The nearer fulfilment does not exhaust the prophecy; it is rather a pledge and type of the final and complete fulfilment which alone adequately satisfies the language. The prediction is so exact as to surpass what any ancient historian extant furnishes; so much so that the heathen Porphyry betook himself to the same refuge of unbelief which the destructive critics of late days affect -- the pretense of a writer in Maccabean times, who personated Daniel in Babylon! The vision in Dan. 8:9-14 dwells on what is now history; the interpretation, in 23-25, mainly on what is yet to be fulfilled.

The "king of fierce countenance" thus has a double reference: Antiochus Epiphanes as the historical type, and the future enemy of Israel in the latter day as the antitype. This future adversary is described as mighty, but not by his own power -- supported by a mightier monarch still farther north. He shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many:

he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

The 2300 Days and the Sanctuary

Dan. 8:14 is a verse of peculiar interest and difficulty: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." The computation of "2300 evenings-mornings" refers to the period during which the daily sacrifice was to be taken away and the sanctuary trodden under foot. It helps to clear the book and its particular visions if we observe that the last Beast in Dan. 7 is the western Empire; and Rev. 11-13, 17 enables us to say the Roman Empire revived but pointedly distinguished from Babylon the Harlot, viewed as a great city as well as the great corruptress of Christendom. Here the Beast and the ten horns, his vassal kings, unite to destroy; but they are themselves destroyed by the Lamb when He returns with His glorified saints from heaven (Rev. 17:4, 19:14).

This chapter however brings to light a power in the east, not Roman, but from the Seleucid quarter of Alexander's divided empire. And we have to distinguish the general vision of which v. 14 forms the close from the interpretation which deals with the future catastrophe and goes from v. 19 to v. 26. For the interpretations given by scripture add fresh light, and enable us to discriminate the part accomplished in Antiochus Epiphanes from the final enemy of Israel in the N.E. Of him we hear much in Dan. 9, "the king of the north" at the end, who is to be judged no less awfully than the Roman emperor of that day, and his antichristian colleague, the false prophet-king in the land. This N.E. power is the same predicted by "the Assyrian" of Isaiah, Micah, and other prophets.

I see no reason to doubt that the 2300 evenings-mornings was literally accomplished in Antiochus Epiphanes of whom we hear so much, in Dan. 11:21-32. But the special object of the vision in its ultimate scope is the enemy "at the last end of the indignation." In Dan. 9 we have another sort of

computation -- by "Weeks," or periods of seven years; and there the Roman capture of Jerusalem is plainly set out, though in the general interval without date after the cutting off of the Messiah. But the last week, severed from the chain, awaits its completion in the doings of both the Western emperor and his eastern antagonist at the end of the age.

The Continuity of Divine Faithfulness

It is well to observe that Dan. 8:11 and the first half of 12 are really a parenthesis. The change of gender, faithfully owned in the A. V., is slighted in the R. V. Its aim seems to have been to make the personality stronger, and here therefore to refer rather to the antitype than to the historical horn, which before and after the parenthesis is called "it." In the interpretation nothing is said of the "2300 evenings-mornings," or 1150 days, and of treading down the sanctuary, which may therefore be accomplished already. This period is known to be approximately near: none can deny its absolute exactness, of which the believer is sure. Prophecy interprets history, not the converse. The one is absolutely reliable, as from God; the other imperfect at best, often partial and prejudiced, too often adverse to the truth.

As to unfulfilled prophecy, superstition (slave of tradition) is dull and dark, rationalism is blind and hostile to God. Superstition is not faith and therefore incapable of understanding beforehand; rationalism is in principle antagonistic to the truth, for it denies that prophecy is ever specific, and especially on the remote future. Hence, as superstition is unbelieving and unexercised, so rationalism offers nothing but futile interpretations to blot out the glorious future of God's kingdom by any little earnest in the past. But this falls so short as to give the willing impression that the prophets exaggerated or lied, like the poets or politicians of the day. Who but the unintelligent could confound the little horn of Dan. 8 with that of ch. 7? or either the western or the north-eastern chief with the wilful king, to reign at the time of the end in Palestine, described in Dan.

11:36-39? The last no doubt is the Antichrist, here viewed politically, in 2 Thess. 2 religiously as the man of sin opposed to the Man of righteousness, Who will appear from heaven to destroy him. For he was but a type of the final representative of that power, the enemy of the Antichrist whose ally is the last chief of the Roman empire: all to perish for ever in the day of Jehovah.

Supplementary Notes

Short entries from Part Six: Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, preserved word-for-word.

Daniel 8:14

Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, p. 379

It helps to clear the book and its particular visions if we observe that the last Beast in Dan. 7 is the western Empire; and Rev. 11-13, 17 enables us to say the Roman Empire revived but pointedly distinguished from Babylon the Harlot. Here the Beast and the ten horns, his vassal kings, unite to destroy; but they are themselves destroyed by the Lamb when He returns with His glorified saints from heaven (Rev. 17:4, 19:14). No ingenuity can make these revealed facts fit into the Protestant interpretation.

One main defect of that hypothesis is that it neglects the final future crisis for the Jewish people and the land before the Lord appears in glory and judgment. Another is that the proper Christian and church hope is not appreciated by this school, but mixed up with the Jewish. The times and seasons, which wholly pertain to the earthly people, are misapplied to Christians. These are not of the world and are called to be ever expecting the Lord Jesus, to take them to Himself and the Father's house, before the unaccomplished measures of time begin to apply to the Jews and the powers of the world at the end of this age.

This chapter however brings to light a power in the east, not Roman, but from the Seleucid quarter of Alexander's divided empire. And we have to distinguish the general vision of which v. 14 forms the close from the interpretation which deals with the future catastrophe and goes from v. 19 to v. 26. For the interpretations given by scripture add fresh light, and enable us to discriminate the part accomplished in Antiochus Epiphanes from the final enemy of Israel in the N.E. There are no dates attached to Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the four great Gentile empires raised up successively on the apostasy of the Jews, and set aside by the kingdom of God figured by the little Stone. But in the

corresponding vision of the four Beasts, judged and superseded by the universal kingdom of the Son of man when the saints of the heavenly places appear, and the people of those saints, we have the well-known formula of "a time, times, and half a time," i.e. three years and a half, during which times and laws will be given into the hand of their western enemy. Dan. 8 is occupied with the east, and "the daily" is taken away "by reason of transgression"; and the peculiar term occurs of "2,300 evenings-mornings," which I see no reason to doubt was literally accomplished in Antiochus Epiphanes of whom we hear so much, in Dan. 11:21-32. But the special object is the enemy "at the last end of the indignation."

The Bible Treasury, New Series 1:319.

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