

“WALKING IN THE SHADOW OF THE ANTICHRIST”**“The Ram vs. The Goat” (Daniel 8:1-8)**

The second great prophetic vision given to the aged prophet Daniel will reveal even more detail than the one given to him in Daniel 7. It is as if the camera moves from the broad panoramic view and zeroes in on two of the Empires identified in Daniel 7. This vision of future chaos and upheaval had a tremendous effect on Daniel, *“And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it.”* (v27)

The language switches from Aramaic (the language of the Gentile world of the day) to Hebrew till the end of the book, which is suggestive that the message of this section is particularly focused on the Jewish people. We see expressions like the *“pleasant land,”* the *“holy people,”* as well as the temple and its sacrifices, which are suggestive that this concerned the Jews and Jerusalem. In previous chapters from Daniel 2:4 to 7 the language was in Aramaic as the message was mainly directed to the Gentiles or to those occupying in a Gentile land. The chapter can be generally divided: verses 1-14 contain the detailed account of Daniel’s vision, and verses 15-27 give us the interpretation of that vision.

*In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me at the first. And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai. (v1-2)*

This third vision is 2 years after the one received in Daniel 7 but 12 years before the events recorded in Daniel 5 with the writing on the wall at Belshazzar’s party. It occurs in the third year of King Belshazzar (c. 551 BC), which is around a dozen years before the collapse of the Empire. The Babylonian Empire is tottering on the brink of destruction. A wise man like Daniel would have discerned that the end is nigh with men like Belshazzar on the throne. Likely he could see that it is only a matter of time until the Medo-Persian armies sweep into to devour it. The fact of the rise of Cyrus and his conquest of the nations around him would also have not struck Daniel as a surprising thing as he was a student of Scripture. Over 150 years earlier the prophet Isaiah had predicted the rise of this man,

**That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. (Isa. 44:28)**

**Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; (Isa. 45:1)**

So we must see this vision in the light of the events recorded in Daniel 5. The connection between the Babylonian Empire and the Jews is almost over. That is why the focus in Daniel 8 is on the immediate powers that will impact the Jews – the Medo-Persians and the Greeks.

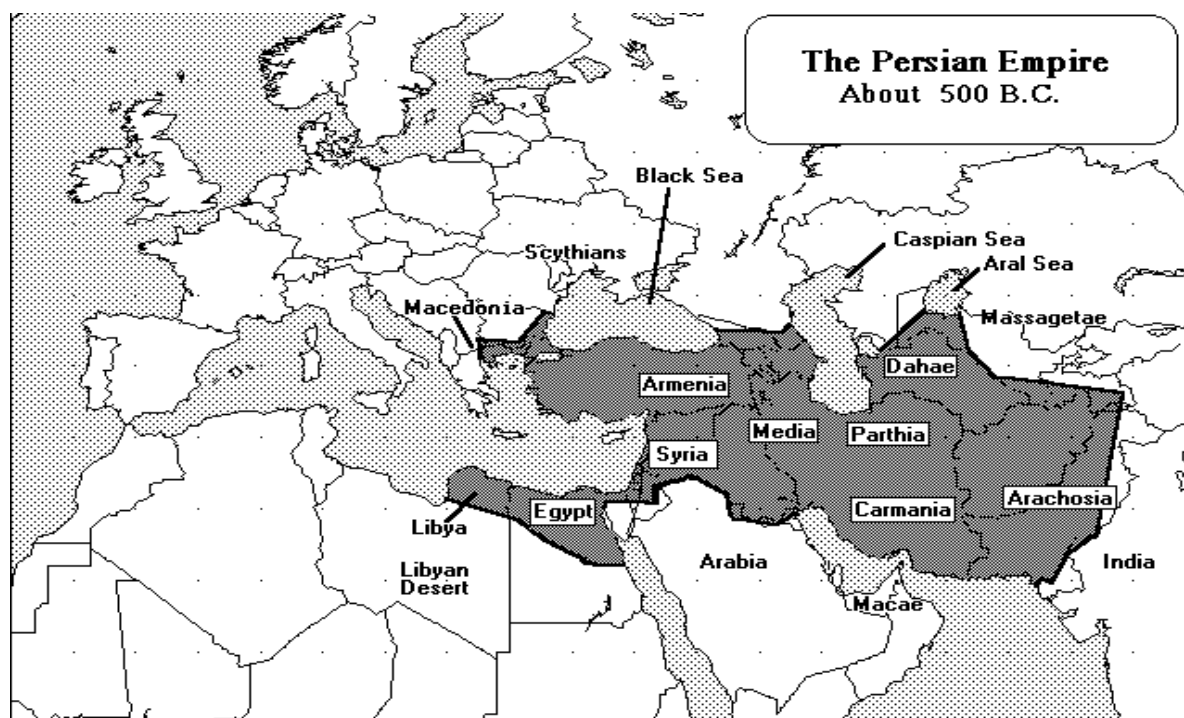
Daniel is around 70 years of age and living in Babylon at this time. He is suddenly seemingly transported in this vision in space and time to Shushan, which would eventually be one of the great cities of the Medo-Persian Empire. Shushan is around 250 miles east of Babylon in modern day Iran. The Persian Emperor Xerxes eventually built his royal palace there after the

death of Daniel. It is the scene for many of the events in the Book of Esther. Nehemiah also lived and worked there.

*Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great. (v3-4)*

The symbols now change from silver in Daniel 2 and a bear in Daniel 7 to a ram. This ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire, “*The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.*” (v20) Interestingly, the ram was said to be the national emblem of Persia. Ammianus Marcellinus, a fourth century historian, reveals that the Persian king bore the head of a ram as he stood at the head of his army. The “*two horns*” that are raised up “*high*” represent here political and military power. This description of the uneven horns, “*one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last*” corresponds to the symbol of the bear in Daniel 7 where the bear, “*raised up itself on one side*” (7:5). This represents how the Persians emerged later than the Medes as a powerful nation but came to dominate the alliance under Cyrus the Persian.

The Persian Ram/Bear devoured the Babylonian Empire and much more. It began with just 50,000 square miles of territory and expanded to consume around 100 countries stretching from Afghanistan and India in the east to southern Ethiopia in the west. Hence the description, “*I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great.*” History confirms that the three great directions the Medo-Persian Empire expanded its territories were to Babylon in the West, Armenia and Scythia toward the North, and Egypt and Ethiopia toward the South. There were no major conquests towards the east.



The Persians became inflated with pride and their invincibility. In about 10 years Cyrus had built the greatest Empire the world had ever seen. It seemed that their kings like Cyrus the Great could do as they pleased, so that *“he did according to his will, and became great.”* The Persian armies contained millions of soldiers. No country seemed able to withstand their might.

*And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. (v5)*

Just like the vision of Daniel 2 and 7 another power emerged in this vision. This time the symbol changes from a torso of brass in Daniel 2 and a leopard in Daniel 7 to a *“he goat”* or a male goat. Again we are explicitly told who this symbol represents, *“And the rough goat is the king of Grecia.”* (v21a) The *“he goat”* with *“a notable horn between his eyes”* is clearly Alexander the Great. Normally such goats have two horns, but this *“he goat”* only has one to signify one great leader. Interestingly, the goat was a national symbol of the Greeks. Aegeus, who was known as the goat-man, was said in Greek mythology to be the founder of Athens. Some say that Philip of Macedonia even called his son Alexander, *“Aegeus the goat-man.”* John Phillips points out, *“According to tradition, Caremus, the first Macedonian king, was directed by an oracle to take a goat for a guide and build a city. This he did, following a herd of goats to Edessa, which he made his capital, changing its name to Egaea (the goat city).”*

Philip the Macedonian dreamed to first unite the independent Greek city-states like Athens, Thebes, and Sparta. Once that dream was accomplished he then hoped to drive out the Persians from Greece and destroy their Empire. When his father Philip the Macedonian was murdered before fulfilling even the first of these dreams, his young son Alexander took on the mantle. He rapidly took control of the independent Greek city-states and unified them under him. Alexander did this with brutal efficiency by first ruthlessly butchering the inhabitants of Thebes as an example to the other Greek city-states. The rest soon capitulated to his rule. Alexander’s next ambition was to conquer the great Persian rival that ruled the world for centuries. He would come from Greece in the West and then expand his power eastwards into the Persian territories, *“came from the west on the face of the whole earth.”* His legendary conquests were so rapid and ruthless that he is pictured like a *“leopard”* in Daniel 7 and also in Daniel 8 as a *“he goat”* that *“touched not the ground.”*

Kingdom	Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon	Head of Gold	Lion with Eagle’s Wings	
Medo - Persian	Chest of Silver	Bear with 3 ribs	Ram with 2 horns
Greek	Torso of Brass/Bronze	Leopard with 4 wings	Goat: <b>Greece</b> Great horn: <b>Alexander the Great</b> 4 Horns: <b>4 Generals</b>
Ancient Rome	Legs of Iron	Great Beast with 10 horns	
Antichrist Empire	Feet of Iron and Clay	Little Horn	Little Horn: <b>Antiochus Epiphanes</b> (a type of the Antichrist)

*And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote*

*the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. (v6-7)*

The goat then attacked the ram in the vision. This was provoked we are told by “*the fury of his power*” and “*he was moved with choler against him.*” This word “*choler*” has the idea of great boiling anger. Alexander (and his men) nursed a deep hatred towards the Persians that was more than just a power play. He swore to avenge the humiliations that they had inflicted on the Greeks such as the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. One particular scar was the burning of Athens, including the Acropolis, by Xerxes the Great in a fit of anger at Greek resistance to his Persian invasion. As a proud Greek, who was trained by Aristotle, Alexander passionately believed in the superiority of the Greek culture and language and could not accept that the barbarian Persians had subjugated them. He despised the haughty Persians who believed that all wisdom and the ancient civilizations originated from the East.



THE RAM



THE HE-GOAT

Dan. 8 : 1-27

Some of the fiercest battles of ancient history were fought between the Greeks and the Persians; hence fulfilling the prophecy, “*he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram.*” The demise of the Persians took only a few years. Just as a male goat is stronger and more agile than a ram, so we find the same in the clashes between Alexander and the Persians.

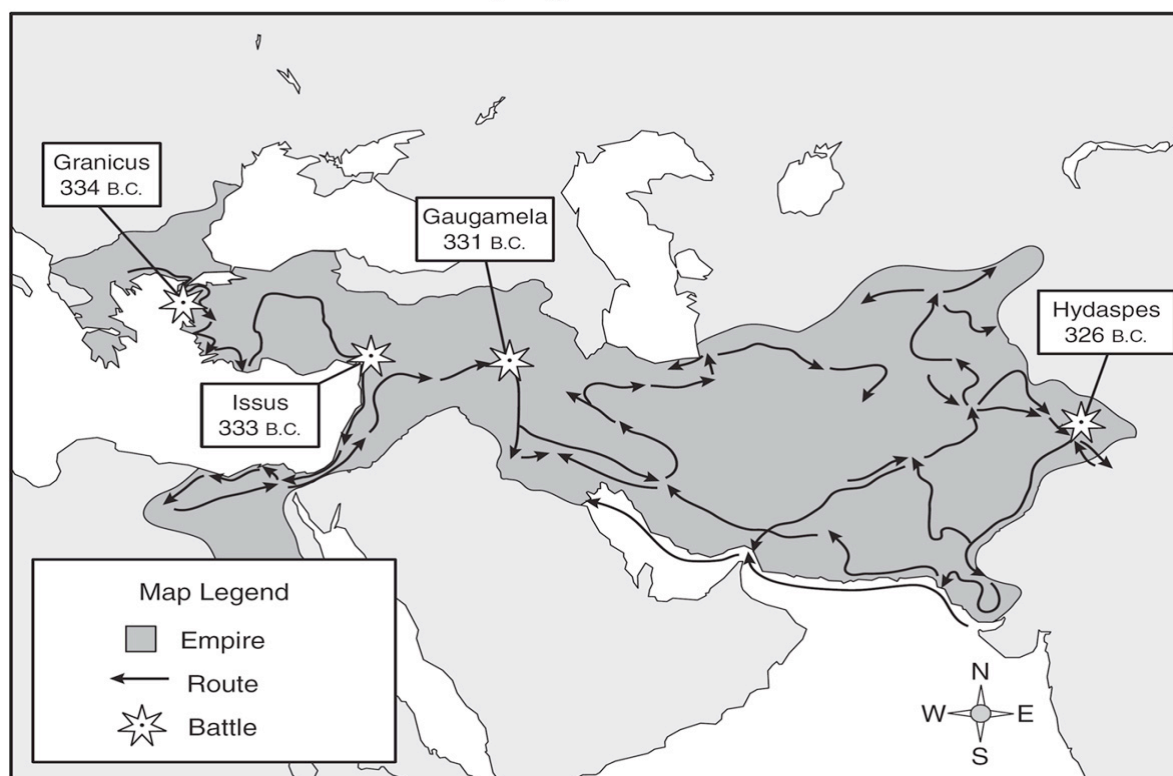
In 334 BC Alexander crossed the Dardenelles from Modern Greece and entered Modern Turkey. He defeated Darius the Third’s army at the *Battle of Granicus* in Turkey, which was the first of three major battles fought between Alexander the Great and the Persian Empire. Another decisive victory occurred at the *Battle of Issus* in 333 BC near the southeast Turkish border with modern Syria. Despite Darius having the greater number of soldiers, Alexander routed his forces there. From this moment on, Darius desperately sought to make peace with Alexander, but the young “*he goat*” was not interested. Darius even offered his daughter in marriage and all the territories west of the Euphrates. Alexander’s general Parmenio reportedly argued with his leader, “If I were Alexander I would accept this offer” and Alexander famously replied “So should I, if I were Parmenio.”

Alexander then marched south all the way to Egypt. After conquering the great city of Tyre he was eventually crowned Pharaoh in Egypt in 332 BC. There he built the famous city of Alexandria to honour his name and to expand the Greek culture and language. He then took the ancient city of Babylon in 331 BC and the net was closing rapidly on the remainder of the Old Persian Empire. By 330 BC Alexander had conquered the Persian royal city of Susa some 375 miles southeast of Babylon. As a symbolic act of his subjugation of the Persians, Alexander sat

on Darius' throne beneath the legendary golden canopy. Darius was assassinated just a short time later. The final insult to the Persians was carried out at the Persian royal city of Persepolis that was built as a capital by Darius the Great. This city was regarded as the pride of the Persians. After looting all its treasures, Alexander ordered it to be burned to the ground as an act of revenge for the burning of Athens. Only forty stone columns remain of its ruins.

The Bible accurately predicted that the “*he goat*” Alexander, “*smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand.*” The Persian ram had its time of world domination when it seemed invincible, “*so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great.*” (v4) But the young he goat suddenly arose in great fury and totally annihilated it. Despite its once formidable armies and great wealth the Persians were crushed by the young conqueror, “*there was no power in the ram to stand before him.*”

### The Campaigns of Alexander



Incredibly, Alexander's relatively tiny army had destroyed its much larger rival. Alexander had the greatest Empire the world had ever seen to this point. The fruits of victory may have been sweet for Alexander but they were to be short-lived.

*Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. (v8)*

The conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander truly enlarged his power and his ego as he “*waxed very great.*” With an army of around 30-50,000 he had defeated a mighty Empire that had

as many as 2,500,000 soldiers. Alexander came to regard himself as divine and a descendant of the Greek god Zeus. The Persians were tolerant of others religions and cultures and generally had a policy of “live and let live” in such matters. But Alexander dreamed of filling the world with Greek values, language, and culture. Now Greek power, philosophy, poetry, art, customs, and language became widespread from Turkey to India. Greek culture and philosophy formed the foundation for much of what today is known as Western civilization. Even today, Westerners study epic poems of Homer like, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Alexander really did believe he was “Alexander the Great.” He became more rash and ruthless in his conquests and was consumed with expanding his Empire eastwards to subjugate India. Eventually his own men grew tired of his relentless passion for expansion and revolted. Despite his threats and promises they refused to go any further. Alexander fell into a spiral of alcoholism and debauchery. But just at the height of his powers, Alexander was cut down in death, “*and when he was strong, the great horn was broken.*” This was fulfilled when Alexander died at the age of around 32-33. Few mourned the passing of such a tyrant. Alexander the Great wasn’t so great now! He had gained the world but lost his soul. The man who conquered the Persian world couldn’t conquer himself! That’s a powerful lesson of history that few take heed of.

There are elements of this vision that are of great significance to us in our generation. Some of the events prophesied may well be fulfilled in our lifetime. There are aspects of it that will be seen in the final Antichrist kingdom will have the characteristics of the Gentile World Empires. For instance, John MacArthur points out that Alexander the Great is a type of the Antichrist, “There he was, a perfect illustration of the power of antichrist. Fast, incredible, effective, world dominating. That’s how it’ll be with the antichrist. He’ll be that kind of military genius. He’ll be an Alexander and a Napoleon and a Hitler all rolled into one.”

## AFTER ALEXANDER

When Alexander died suddenly at the age of 32 in 323 BC his Empire descended in chaos for a number of years as rival powers fought over it. Eventually it was divided among his four generals – Lysimachus, Antipater, Ptolemy, and Seleucus. This fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 8, “*and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.*”



This prophetic reality was recorded in other visions to Daniel,

**After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. (Daniel 7:6)**

**And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those. (Daniel 11:3-4)**

### CONCLUSION

The most remarkable thing in Daniel 8 is that when Daniel received these detailed prophecies the Babylonian Empire was still standing. It even had 12 more years left to run. If a shrewd analyst of world affairs could have predicted the conquest of the Persians over the forces of Belshazzar, no one could have foreseen the rise of Alexander the Great. At this point in world history Greece was only a coalition of rival city-states – it was not even a unified country let alone an Empire. From the vantage point of the twenty first century we can observe that biblical prophecy is merely history written in advance by God.

According to Jewish historians, these prophecies of Daniel even touched the heart of Alexander the Great when he advanced to the City of Jerusalem. Despite the Jews supporting the Persians over the Greeks in war, Alexander was favourable to the Jewish people and appreciated much of their identity and religion. The Talmud records how he came to a respectful accommodation in 329 BC with the High Priest of Jerusalem, Simon the Just. The High Priest came out dressed in his priestly robe to meet Alexander to do reverence to the king. When Alexander met the High Priest he claimed that he had seen a vision of him dressed like this blessing his conquests. Josephus then records of Alexander,

And when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the Book of Daniel was showed him wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present; but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favors they pleased of him; whereupon the high priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired. And when they entreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired. And when he said to the multitude, that if any of them would enlist themselves in his army, on this condition, that they should continue under the laws of their forefathers, and live according to them, he was willing to take them with him, many were ready to accompany him in his wars. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII, 5)

Understanding Bible prophecy is like doing a jigsaw puzzle. All the pieces have to be laid out carefully and studied and then slowly pieced together slowly and carefully. One must not try to force interpretations and identifications with rash speculation on past or current events. But just like the jigsaw pieces, the right piece always fits into the right place without having to be forced. Daniel has been given all the big pieces in his puzzle but we with the benefit of 2,500 years of subsequent history can fit them together with actual dates, names, and places. Some of the things here greatly puzzled even Daniel. There are always prophetic aspects that are difficult to be absolutely definitive about. That's the way God intended. As someone once said, "Prophecy is given not so we will understand all that the infinitely wise God is doing. Prophecy is given to remind us that God is in control."

**Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.**

**Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.**

**To all life Thou givest, to both great and small;  
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;  
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
And wither and perish, but nought changeth Thee.**