

Superpowers in Conflict

by Denis Lyle

The sermon explores the prophecy in Daniel 8, which describes the conflict between the Medo-Persian and Greek Empires, and the persecution of the Jewish people by Antiochus Epiphanes, who is seen as a prototype of the future Antichrist.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 21:8, Daniel 8:1-26, Matthew 24:15, Revelation 13:2, Revelation 19:19

Topics: "Biblical Prophecy", "End Times"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on the prophetic vision in Daniel 8, highlighting the conflict between two great world powers, the Medo-Persian Empire symbolized by a ram and the Greek Empire symbolized by a he-goat. The vision also reveals the rise of historical figures like Alexander the Great and Antiochus Epiphanes, who foreshadows the future Antichrist. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and responding to prophecy, urging believers to be moved by the coming events and actively engage in God's work before His return.

Transcript

Reading: Daniel 8:1-27 SUPERPOWERS IN CONFLICT Some years ago an USA Army colonel retired. Just before his retirement however, he said that he participated in a mock staging of World War 111. Joining other officers from the Pentagon, he left Washington DC and went to a remote underground retreat, established to carry on the affairs of government in the event of a nuclear attack. There these military men staged the "final conflict", between the nations. They projected that it would begin with a nuclear exchange between Israel and the Arab nations.

The great superpowers, the USA and Russia would next be drawn in, and finally the European nations would join the conflict. The ensuing world-wide nuclear warfare would result in the loss of 55 million lives in the USA alone. So shaken at this prospect was this Christian army officer that he resigned his commission and now spends his time trying to reach people, especially children with the Gospel before the end comes. Daniel too is shaken as he sees in prophetic vision a coming conflict between two great world powers.

Clouds of doom are gathering which indicate deep trials for his own people, the Jews. In fact, Daniel (Ch 8) introduces a new section of the book signalled by the return to the use of the Hebrew language. The earlier chapters (2:4... 7:28) are in Aramaic, the language of the Gentile world of the day, for these chapters relate specifically to Gentile world powers. Beginning with (Ch 8) however the emphasis is on the

destiny of the people of Israel. From now on in this book everything will be seen from the perspective of the Hebrew people.

God is going to uniquely show how He will deal with His people. The land of Israel has been the nerve centre of the world since the time of Abraham. When Jesus Christ came to earth, Israel became the truth centre of the world. There is coming a day in the future, in the Millennium when the land will be the peace centre of the world. Today, as we look at that small piece of property in the Middle East it is the storm centre of the world. Now keep in mind that the first six chapters in this book are historical, the second six are prophetic.

In (Ch 1-6) we see Daniel and his Personal Friends, in (7-12) we see Daniel and his People's Future! Now in (Ch 7 & 8) there is brought Two Coming Dictators. Both are described as "a little horn", (7:8 8:9) though the "little horn", of (Ch 7) is not the same person as the "little horn", of (Ch 8) In (Ch 7) the person so described is Antichrist, in (Ch 8) the person described is Antiochus. Antichrist is associated with the Final stage of the Roman Empire. Antiochus is associated with the Final stage of the preceding Greek Empire.

Antiochus has already come and gone so we in the 21st century can study his story in the light of history. The Antichrist has not yet come so we are confined to prophecy for information about him. Now having underscored that important distinction between the two horns in the two chapters lets get down to (Ch 8) (1) THE INTRODUCTION TO THE VISION The introductory statement in (8:1-2) provides us with certain data about the vision. Notice for e.g.; (a) THE PERIOD OF THE VISION: " In the third year...

"(8:1) Do you recall how (Ch 7) began "In the first year... "That was 553 BC, this is now 551 BC. So Daniel had two years to turn over in his mind what he had been told in (Ch 7) Chronologically then this chapter belongs between (Ch 4) which deals with the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar and (Ch 5) which deals with the overthrow of Belshazzar and Babylon! (b) THE PROPHET OF THE VISION: For the recipient of this vision is Daniel. Now of course when you realise that (Ch 8) actually comes before (Ch 5) you can understand why Daniel showed contempt for the gifts of Belshazzar.

This servant of God had known for some time that the Babylonian Empire was to be replaced on the world stage by the Medo-Persian Empire! (a) (b) (c) THE PLACE OF THE VISION: Look at (8:2) This was a chief city of the Medo -Persian Empire about 250 miles east of Babylon. Now at the interesting thing is this, that this city was going to be the very nerve centre of the next kingdom. Babylon was a falling star, and the Medo-Persia Empire was about to begin. Do you recall that this important Persian capital became the home for Esther and Nehemiah So here is the setting for this vision. (1) (2) THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE VISION You see, in (8:3-14) there is brought before us basic information about this vision of Daniel's and this section which contains the heart of this prophecy concerns A Ram, a He-Goat, and A Little Horn!

Now this vision breaks down into two parts: (a) THE LAST EASTERN EMPIRE: The Ram. Now we don't need to go to an encyclopaedia to find out who this ram is, because we get the answer in (8:20) Now a horn is the symbol of power and this ram had two powerful horns symbolising the Medo-Persia alliance, and though Media was the first major power of the time Persia under Cyrus soon got the upper hand. Now notice: 1. The Description of the Rams Appearance: For this animal is described as a ram, a ferocious animal, easily upset.

The Ram was the symbol of Persia. The King of Persia wore a rams head of gold and if you go into the museums and look at the old coins of ancient Persia you'll find a rams head on one side. 2. The Direction

of the Rams Activities: With its head lowered this ram is pushing in three directions... West: North: South! This of course represents the Persian conquests with Syria (West) Armenia (North) and Egypt (South) 3. The Dimensions of the Rams Authority: Negatively, the ram had no rival capable of withstanding its violent attacks.

Positively, the ram did whatever it pleased and thus became great. So the ram is Medo-Persia. Now this is wonderful because please remember that at the moment Daniel was having this vision Babylon was ruling the world. Belshazzar was still on the throne and nobody expected the Medo-Persian Empire forces to come and defeat the Babylonians. Yet that is exactly what happened, for when we were in (Ch 5) Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede received the kingdom. So Daniel is getting a vision here of the next Gentile world power which is to come and will rule in the place of Babylon.

Now we have been through this already in (Ch 2 & 7) but here there is another difference. Do you recall that when we saw the four Gentile world powers in (Ch 2) they were revealed under metals, and that was very impressive. But then in (Ch 7) we saw something different, we saw these four Gentile world powers again, but they were revealed as animals. But now we have something different again. For we see the two middle world powers Medo-Persia and Greece under a different animal metaphor.

What does it all mean Something very simple. In (Ch 2) we see these four world powers as Man views the Kingdoms! Man looks at these kingdoms and sees their outward glory. In (Ch 7) we see these four world powers as God views the kingdoms. How does God see them As ravenous beasts! But here in (Ch 8) we see these world powers as the Jew views the kingdoms! Jewish thought is brought into this chapter because the Jews are going to have trouble. My, this is why Daniel got so sick because he saw what was going to happen to his own nation.

So we have in the Ram (a) but look at: (b) THE FIRST WESTERN EMPIRE: The Goat! Now the Goat is the symbol of Greece. The first Greek colony was established by an oracle that sent a goat for a guide to build a city. The goat came to the region of Greece, and in gratitude for the goat's leading them in the right direction, they called the city Agae, meaning the "Goat City". The name of the sea upon whose shores the city was built was called the Aegean Sea or the "Goat Sea". But its far better to be guided by Scripture than Symbols so look at (8:21) So we are left in no doubt that this is the Grecian Empire!

Did you notice WHERE this male goat is coming from: (8:5) From the West. The Babylonians and the Medo-Persians all came from the East, but here is a world power and strangely enough its coming from the West a new thing as far as history is concerned. Did you notice HOW this male goat is coming It " touched not the ground". (8:5) This goat is bounding along at terrific speed. But the striking feature of this goat were the horns that came from it. For in (8:6) we read of "a notable horn", in (8:8) we read of "four notable horns", (8:8) and in (8:9) we read of "a little horn".

Now what does all that mean Well, lets take them one by one. Notice: 1. THE LARGE HORN: Now keep in mind that the Male Goat is Greece. Look at (8:5) In (8:8) this is described as "the great horn." This "great horn", is identified in (8:21) as "the first king". Well, who was the first king of Greece Alexander the Great! When he was growing up, his mother taught that he was the descendant of Achilles and Hercules. No wonder the kid was motivated. When he was just a little boy there was a horse that everyone in his family tried to break, but no one could do it.

Alexander said "I'll do it". And he did. According to historians, that was the horse that he rode in all of the great campaigns as led by the Greeks in their conquest of the world. Indeed his conquests were so rapid

that in 13 years he had subdued all the known world, charging everywhere in goat fashion. Do you see how he dealt with the Medo-Persian Empire (8:6-7) He was determined to crush the hated Persians who previously had invaded Greece, and he totally routed them on three separate occasions in 334 BC in 333BC and in 331 BC.

A story was told that when Alexander was on his way to Jerusalem to conquer that city, the Jewish High Priest Juddua met him outside the city and showed him how a Hebrew prophet by the name of Daniel had predicted his defeat over the Persians some 225 years previous. Alexander read the prophecy and it is said that he got down on his knees and worshipped. However, it did not save him from an early death just as it was foretold. For look at (8:8) Alexander died at the age of thirty three, a victim of his own drunkenness and depression because there weren't any more worlds to conquer. 1. 2.

THE LEADING HORNS: Look at (8:8) Those of you who know your history will know that following Alexander's death, his kingdom was divided among his four leading generals. Ptolemy took the Southern part... Egypt. Seleucus took the Eastern part... Syria. Cassander took the Western part... Greece. Lysimachus took the Northern part... Asia Minor. Now remember we are still thinking about Greece and these four notable horns correspond to the four heads of the leopard in (7:6) So you have here 1:2 3.

THE LITTLE HORN: Look at (8:9) That is, coming from one of the four horns, one of Alexander's Generals, came forth a little horn. Now there are several things I want you to notice about this "little horn". Look at: * His DESCRIPTION: " A little horn". (8:9) Do you recall that we met with "a little horn", back in (7:8) Here we meet with another one. The question is, are they the same Is the little horn of (Ch 8) to be identified with the little horn of (Ch 7) Well, clearly they are not identically the same, for the little horn of (Ch 7) arises out of the Roman Empire in the end times, while the little horn of (Ch 8) arises out of the Grecian Empire in ancient times.

So there is a distinction we need to mark, but there is also a similarity we need to note! You see, the reason both are described as "little horns", is because one prefigures the other. Well, who was this "little horn, "of (Ch 8) You may never have heard of this man in your ancient history courses in school but this prophecy was fulfilled in a person called Antiochus Epiphanes! His name, means "Antiochus, God Manifest." He was a Syrian. Remember that Syria was one of the four divisions of Alexander's Empire!

He came to the throne in 175BC and ruled until 164BC. He was Anti-Semitic. For after trying to conquer the world and being stopped by Roman armies, he turned his fury on Jerusalem and sacked the city. He killed some 80,000 Jews and sold another 40,000 into slavery. * His DIRECTION: For this "little horn", conquers to the South (Egypt) to the East (Armenia) and to the "pleasant land", (Palestine) The ancient historical records of Antiochus Epiphanes describe battle's all in these geographic areas. * His DEVELOPMENT: " Which waxed exceeding great". (8:9) This "horn", does not remain little, for through its spectacular advances it becomes great. * His DEFIANCE: In (8:10-12) Do you see what this man Antiochus did He ATTACKED the SAINTS: (8:10) This is picturesque language portraying his persecution against the Jewish people, using the figure of stars. (Gen 12:3 Exod 12:41) You see, this man sought to impose Greek culture and religion on all his subjects including the Jews, hence persecution.

The Jews were forbidden the practice of circumcision and history records that there were two mothers who because of their deep commitment to their faith, were determined to circumcise their baby boys. When Antiochus heard about it, he took the babies and killed them, hung them about each mothers neck, and marched the women through the streets of Jerusalem to the highest wall. There the women and their

babies were thrown headlong over the precipice! He ATTACKED the SANCTUARY: He assailed the Creator of the Universe Himself (the Prince of the Host) Then on 16th December 168 BC he walked into the sacred place of the Jews with a pig and slit its throat as a sacrifice on the altar of the Jewish people.

Then it took the blood from that animal and sprayed it all over the inside of the Temple. Do you know what the Jews refer to this as The "abomination of desolation", a phrase used by the Lord to describe the activities of the future Antichrist. (Matt 24:15) He ATTACKED the SCRIPTURES: Look at (8:12) He forbade the observance of the Sabbath, the reading of the Scripture, burning every copy of the Torah he could find. How long did such desecrations last In essence this is the question Daniel overheard two, "holy ones", (angels) discussing in (8:13) a question that no doubt burned in Daniel's mind as well.

How long would the Temple and the Jewish people be trampled under foot by this madman Well, do you see: * His DURATION: In (8:13-14) This desolation would last 2300 days. This is approximately six years. Antiochus begins his desolation in 171 BC and in 165 BC the Temple is cleansed and Jewish sacrifices restored. After Antiochus's death, Jews celebrated the cleansing of their holy place in the Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah, in celebration of the restoration led by Judas Maccabeus.

Now let us pause for a moment and gather in the threads. This Male Goat is Greece. The LARGE HORN is Alexander the Great: The LEADING HORNS are his four Generals who divided his empire into four after his death. The LITTLE HORN who emerges from Syria is Antiochus Epiphanes. He is a Jew beater and chronologically he is appearing in the Inter-testamental period between Malachi and Matthew. Now while there is an obvious distinction between the " little horn", of (Ch 7) and the "little horn", of (Ch 8) there is also a connection between them.

For both are described as "little horns", the reason Because one prefigures the other. My, Antiochus is a prototype of the future Antichrist! What Antiochus did to the Jews is what Antichrist will do to the Jews. What Antiochus did in the inter-testamental period, the Antichrist will do in the Tribulation period, for Antiochus foreshadows Antichrist. Is this the reason why some scholars believe that the future Antichrist will be a Syrian Jew (1) (2) (3) THE INTERPRETATION OF THE VISION When we look at these prophecies we have the advantage of comparing them with their historical fulfilment, yet we still find them difficult to understand.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Daniel to try and grasp their meaning, while all these things were still future No wonder it says in (8:15) that he " sought for the meaning". God responded by sending Gabriel to give the meaning! So we have here (3) (a) THE "ANIMALS "ARE IDENTIFIED: The Ram symbolised the Medo-Persian Empire (8:20) The He-Goat represented the Greek Empire (8:21) The Great Horn "is the first king", the man we now know as Alexander the Great. The Four Horns represented the four-fold division of the Empire, but none of those who seized power would wield the authority of the King who founded the Empire (b) THE "HORN "IS PERSONIFIED: I mean this "horn", is an historical figure. (8:24-25) Now this "horn", is personified: 1.

HISTORICALLY in ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES: What a man he was. A man who came from Syria, north of Palestine. A man who waged war against the people of Israel. A man who sought to stamp out the worship of the people of Israel. 1. 2. PROPHETICALLY IN ANTICHRIST: Prophecy sometimes has a double fulfilment. So here we are to see the Partial Fulfilment of the vision in Antiochus and the Complete Fulfilment in Antichrist. In other words Antiochus is a type, a foretaste of the man of sin, the Antichrist... the "little horn", of (Ch 7) Martin Luther says, "This chapter in Daniel refers both to Antiochus and

Antichrist".

A double fulfilment. Now there are: * Examples in Scripture that Affirm a Dual Fulfilment: Look at (Is 9:6-7) This prophecy has a dual fulfilment. The partial fulfilment occurred when the Lord Jesus was born, but the world awaits the final fulfilment when the government of this world will be upon His shoulders. Look at (Lk 1:30-33) Here again we have a dual fulfilment for in one sweeping statement Christ's two comings are predicted. Here there is brought before us both the Cradle and the Crown, but this dual prophecy has been only partially fulfilled in our Lord's birth!

The world still awaits His second advent when He shall receive the throne of David. Please, please if we interpret literally what Gabriel said in (1:30-31) then we should also interpret literally what he said (1:32-33) He was referring to God's covenant with David (2 Sam 7) and His kingdom promises to the people of Israel (Is 9:1-7, 11-12 61, 66 Jer 33) Today, Jesus Christ is enthroned in heaven, but it is not on David's throne. One Day He will return and establish His righteous kingdom on earth, and then these promises will be fulfilled.

So... * * Expressions in Scripture that Confirm a Dual Fulfilment: Look at them. (8:17) "the time of the end", and then in (8:19) "it pertains to the appointed time of the end." (AT) Now in (12:4) "the time of the end", means the time approaching Christ's second coming. Thus we are to see in Antiochus Epiphanes a picture of the Antichrist yet to come, for (8:26) says, "for it belongeth to many days to come". My, Antiochus who caused Jewish blood to run like a river is a picture of Antichrist who will even do much more.

So on the one hand we have the Historical Little Horn in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes, and on the other hand we have the Prophetical Little Horn in the person of Antichrist and the similarity between them is unmistakable. Look: * Both would conquer much: (8:9 Rev 13:4) * Both would magnify themselves: (8:11 Rev 13:5) * Both would be masters of deceit: (7:25 2 Thes 2:10) * Both would hate and persecute Israel: (8:25 Rev 12:13) * Both would profane the Temple: (8:11 Matt 24:15) * Both would be energised by Satan: (8:24 Rev 13:2) * Both would be active in the Middle East: (8:14 9:27) * Both would speak against the Lord God: (8:25) * Both would be utterly destroyed by God: (8:25 Rev 19:19) My, all that Antiochus, Antichrist will be and much more.

Is it any wonder Daniel was overwhelmed for do you see in (8:27) (4) THE INTROSPECTION FROM THE VISION Do you see that there was: (a) A REACTION IN DANIEL: " And I Daniel fainted and was sick". (8:27) You see, Daniel was a Jew and this vision showed what was going to happen to the Jews: the Temple: and Daniel loved his people and he felt this so keenly that it made him ill. My, its all very well to see prophecy being fulfilled, to find this book so intensely interesting, but you know it ought to make us ill.

Can we sleep when we think what this means to those who are unsaved Do these coming events move us as they moved Daniel Do they move your feet to come to the prayer meeting to pray for your family My, do you care at all if they go to hell Or are you moved (a) (b) A RESPONSE FROM DANIEL: He says "I rose up and did the kings business". (8:27) Centuries ago, David said this, "the kings business requireth haste". (1 Sam 21:8) My, do you feel as I do As you get older, the time seems to pass quicker.

The time is passing, the lost are perishing the Lord is Coming. Are you involved in His business Dr. Harry Ironside was ministering on prophecy one evening in a certain church. After the service a man approached him and said, "I'm glad you agree with me". "Oh", said Ironside, "You hold to the second coming do you" "Oh, yes", was the quick reply. " Well, does it hold you" asked Ironside. "What do you mean" asked the

man. "I mean has it gripped you... has it made a difference in your life" Some of you have been listening to prophetic truth for years. Can I ask "has it made a difference in your life"

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