

# The Kingdom of Greece

by John F. Walvoord

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*John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the significance of the Grecian Empire in biblical prophecy and its historical impact through the conquests of Alexander the Great.*

**Scripture:** Daniel 2:39, Daniel 8:21-23, Daniel 10:13, Daniel 11:33, Daniel 11:36, Matthew 24:15, Revelation 13:1

**Topics:** "Biblical Prophecy", "Daniel's Visions"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the prophecy of Daniel, focusing on the rise and conquests of the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great. The accuracy of Daniel's prophecies regarding the empire, its characteristics, and the division of Alexander's conquests among his four generals is highlighted, showcasing the foreknowledge of Biblical prophecy. The sermon also explores the significance of Antiochus Epiphanes in history and prophecy, as a foreshadowing of a future world ruler during the great tribulation. The Grecian Empire's role as a preparation for the Roman Empire, which played a crucial part in the birth of Christ and the unfolding of prophetic events, is emphasized.

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## Transcript

The third world kingdom, which was to succeed that of the Medes and the Persians, was the empire created by Alexander the Great whose armies were victorious over the Persians in 331 b.c. Only occasional reference to this empire is found by name in the Bible. It does not seem to have attracted the attention of the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and it does not coincide with Biblical history in that it fits into the period between Malachi and Matthew.

### Biblical Background

The Hebrew does not actually use the word for Greece or Grecia, but the word yawan or its English equivalent javan. This name is derived from Javan of Genesis 10:2, one of the sons of Japheth and therefore a grandson of Noah. It is commonly believed, however, that Javan was the progenitor of the Greek race which inhabited not only Greece but the islands related to it and hence is properly translated by Grecian where it occurs (cp. Isaiah 66:19; Ezekiel 27:13, 19; Daniel 8:21; 10:20; 11:2; Joel 3:6; Zechariah 9:13).

### Prophecy Of Daniel

According to the prophecy of Daniel in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's image, the Grecian Empire was to be the third kingdom of brass (Daniel 2:39). Further light on the characteristics of this empire is given in Daniel 7:6 in the description of the third beast of Daniel's vision. Daniel describes the third beast as "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." While Daniel's prophecies concerning Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians were fulfilled in part in Daniel's lifetime, in his prediction of the empire of Greece he accurately foreshadowed an empire which did not come into existence until two hundred years later. It would have been impossible for Daniel by any natural insight to have anticipated that a small and insignificant Greek state, namely, Macedonia, should reach such great power and prestige and have such a rapid rise as that of Alexander's kingdom.

### Conquests Of Alexander The Great

History records how Alexander with the agility of a goat crossed the Hellespont, having previously conquered Greece, and began the march to revenge the humiliation inflicted upon Greece by Xerxes more than a century before. Conquering Troy, he first met Persian opposition at Granicus and after subduing all of Asia Minor proceeded to battle a host of one-half million Persians whom Darius had assembled. Meeting in the plain of Issus, he slaughtered the greatly superior Persian force and broke the back of Persian opposition. Proceeding southward, city after city yielded without a fight except for Tyre and Gaza where a siege was necessary before it was subdued.

Continuing south to Egypt, Alexander conquered the entire country without a fight and established the city Alexandria as the capital of the area, which soon became the largest city of the Hellenic world. Proceeding east he had still another battle with Darius at Issus and again defeated a greatly superior force. His armies reached India, but his troops, weary with battle, refused to go further.

Returning to Babylon, Alexander intended to make this the capital of his entire empire. While engaged in establishing his new organization, he died a victim of his profligate eating and drinking coupled with an attack of malaria. Brief as was his domain, the fact that he carried Greek culture with him and often established new cities on a Hellenic pattern had the effect of leaving his mark upon the civilized world of his day and indirectly prepared the area of his conquest to receive the Gospel later which was largely preached in Greek. The extent of his conquest is all the more remarkable because it was foreshadowed in such a clear way in Biblical prophecy.

The description of the leopard, one of the swiftest of beasts, characterizes the lightning-like attack of Alexander's armies which with unprecedented speed swept the world of his day into its power. The four wings on the back of the leopard not only represent the idea of speed, but also symbolize the historic fact that Alexander's empire was controlled after his death by four principal generals, also, anticipated in the four heads of the beast. The accuracy of this prophecy is so evident that liberal scholars who consider detailed prophecy an impossibility are forced to postulate that the entire book of Daniel is in fact a forgery written by a pseudo-Daniel who lived after these events of Alexander's conquest had already taken place. This unwilling confession of the accuracy of Biblical prophecy is in itself most significant and a testimony to the accuracy of prophecy as a whole.

### The Prophecy Of Daniel 8

Unlike the kingdoms of Babylon and that of Media and Persia, there is little prophecy concerning Alexander and his empire outside of Daniel. It does not seem to have attracted the attention of any of the

other prophets, although bare mention is made as previously indicated. More detail is given in Daniel about the Alexandrian Empire, however, than any of the preceding kingdoms. The entire eighth chapter is devoted to portraying the rise of the third empire and further details are given in chapter 11.

In a vision given to Daniel before the fall of Babylon, the conquest of the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians by Alexander was depicted in the destruction of the ram with two horns by the goat with the important horn between its eyes. After describing the conquest of the ram, which portrays the power of the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians, Daniel records the destruction of the Persian Kingdom by Alexander in these words:

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. 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 (Daniel 8:5-7).

This description accurately predicted the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander and his armies which brought to a close more than two hundred years of the illustrious political power under the Persians. The interpretation of these verses is plainly given in Daniel 8:20, 21, "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."

#### Division Of Grecian Empire

As history records, however, Alexander the Great, while able to conquer the world, was not able to conquer himself. When at the pinnacle of his power, Alexander died in a drunken feast and his conquests were peaceably divided between his four generals. This is anticipated in Daniel 8:8: "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." This is interpreted in Daniel 8:22 as being the four kingdoms into which the Grecian Empire was divided, headed up by the four generals of Alexander. Ptolemy was given Egypt and adjacent territories. To Seleucas was given Syria, Asia Minor, and the East. Lysimachus took control of Thrace and adjoining territories. Cassander ruled over Macedonia and Greece itself. Eventually Macedonia and Thrace were joined, resulting in the emergence of three strong kingdoms, Macedonia, Syria, and Egypt. Political rule was therefore divided until the Roman Empire arose to provide a new unifying political factor.

#### Antiochus Epiphanes

Daniel is primarily concerned in his prophetic foreview in Daniel 8 with what constituted a relatively unimportant aspect of the total picture from the standpoint of world history, but what was to be quite important in its relationship to the people of Israel. In Daniel 8:9-14, Daniel records the emergence of "a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land."

The subsequent description of the little horn indicates that it is a man who opposes God (8:10), exalts himself in opposition to God, and takes away the daily sacrifice (8:11, 12). A question is then raised in

Daniel 8:13 as to how long the desolation of the sanctuary shall continue and is answered in 8:14, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."

The vision is subsequently interpreted to Daniel and the revelation is recorded in Daniel 8:15-26. Daniel is informed that the vision relates to "the time of the end" (8:17). Similar expressions are found in 8:19, "the last end of the indignation" and "the time appointed the end" (8:19), and "in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full" (8:23). In the interpretation, the ram with the two horns is stated to be "the kings of Media and Persia" (8:20), and the rough goat is stated to be "the king of Grecia" (8:21). The great horn of the rough goat is declared to be "the first king" (8:21). According to 8:22, the four horns which replaced the single broken horn are "four kingdoms" which shall appear, but which shall not have the power of the great horn.

The little horn of 8:9 is described in 8:23, 24 as "a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences" whose "power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and holy people." He is described also as opposing the Prince of princes, but it is declared that "he shall be broken without hand" (8:25). Students of prophecy have recognized in this description first of all the anticipation of an immediate fulfillment in connection with the Macedonian Empire.

The most probable interpretation of this little horn is that it concerns Antiochus Epiphanes, a ruler in the kingdom of Syria about 170 b.c. His terrible persecution of the Jews which inspired the Maccabean revolt is a matter of history. Through his instrumentality the sacrifices of the Jews were stopped and their temple desecrated. With an army of some 22,000 men he attacked Jerusalem on a Sabbath day massacring the men and making captives of the women and children. He issued a decree commanding that all should worship only according to the religion of the prevailing political power. The resulting revolt of the Jewish people was ultimately resolved only after long struggle and by the ascendance of the Roman Empire.

The reference to 2300 days (literally 2300 mornings and evenings) is best understood as 2300 ordinary days, during which the sanctuary remained desecrated. Historically it was approximately this length of time before a restoration was accomplished. It has been computed that the sanctuary was cleansed on December 25, 165 b.c. by Judas Maccabaeus. This will allow a period from 171 b.c. to 165 b.c. as the period of desecration. However, as the altar was not actually desecrated until December 168 b.c., some have suggested the twenty-three days were actually 1150 mornings plus 1150 evenings, i.e., 2300 mornings and evenings together or approximately 3 ½ years. In any case, there is no excuse for the interpretation that the 2300 days are years and that this marks the year a.d. 1844 as a prophetic date as one cult has taught. An adequate explanation is found in a literal rendering of this period of time. It is, therefore, properly considered a reference to an important and heroic chapter in Israel's history which is probably the most significant event during the period in which Alexander's successors rule as history is viewed from a Biblical standpoint.

#### Antiochus The Foreshadowing Of The Future Prince

Many consider the desecration of the Jewish temple by Antiochus Epiphanes a foreshadowing of a still future desecration that will be fulfilled in the time of the great tribulation (cp. Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-22). The references in the interpretation to "the end" and the description given of the king seem in some respects to go beyond Antiochus Epiphanes. In this case the description would apply to the ultimate world ruler previously described in the little horn of Daniel 7 and concerning whom further revelation is

given in Revelation 13:1-10. If so, this is another instance of dual fulfillment of prophecy, the partial fulfillment foreshadowing the ultimate fulfillment.

### Prophecies Of Daniel 10, 11

Further detail and amplification of this period is found in the remarkable prophecies recorded in Daniel 10, 11. A whole chapter, Daniel 10, is devoted to the introduction in which Daniel is informed that the angelic messenger had been engaged in conflict with demonic powers for three weeks and thus delayed in bringing his message to Daniel (cp. Daniel 10:13). Daniel then records in Daniel 11:1-35 one of the most detailed prophecies to be found anywhere in the Word of God. It has been estimated that one hundred thirty-five prophecies are contained in these thirty-five verses and that all of these prophecies have already been fulfilled.

Details concerning the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes are given in Daniel 11:21-35. Most of the passage describes his conflict with Egypt, "the king of the south." Antiochus himself is described as "a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries" (Daniel 11:21).

At the height of his power he was forced by the rising power of the Roman Empire to give up Egypt. Turning his attention to his own land, he began the persecution of the Jews as previously described in Daniel 8:11-14. In the process it is declared, "They shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate" (Daniel 11:31). The persecution of Israel is indicated in the words, "they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days" (Daniel 11:33). This is an accurate description of the terrors of the Maccabean persecutions.

After describing the role of Antiochus the prophecy leaps to the end of the age in Daniel 11:36 to describe "the king" who "shall do according to his will." This is probably a reference to the final world ruler of whom Antiochus Epiphanes is a foreshadowing. The portion of the prophecy already fulfilled has had its graphic realization in history and stands as another testimony to the accuracy of the prophetic Word. The prophetic vision of Daniel, beginning in verse 36 of the chapter, still remains to be fulfilled in the time of great tribulation of which the trials and persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes were an anticipation.

### Grecian Empire A Preparation For Rome

The precise fulfillment of prophecy in the Grecian Empire sets the stage for the fourth and final Gentile world power, that of Rome, which dominated the scene at the time Christ was born in Bethlehem. It is this empire which figures largely in the history of the church as well as in prophecy of things to come and constitutes the framework of prophecy related to the nations in the end of the age.

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