

THE GREAT PROPAGANDIST

by Ray C. Stedman

The eighth chapter of Daniel contains a different kind of little prophecy than any we have seen before. In the other prophetic sections of the book we have had a more or less direct view of future events brought before us. Chapter 2 was a long-range telescopic view, looking down the whole range of time beginning with Daniel's own day and running on down to the end beyond our own day. Part of it is now fulfilled and part of it is yet unfulfilled. In Chapter 7 we had what we might liken to a zoom camera approach, which moved in to the events of the last days before our Lord's return, wherein we saw the condition of the earth politically, and especially centering around the Mediterranean Sea. We were stirred to note that events of our own day were perhaps beginning to produce the final shape of things.

But now, in Chapter 8, we see events which were future as far as Daniel was concerned but have since been fulfilled in history. Some three hundred years after the prophet Daniel uttered these words, they were, for the most part, fulfilled. Yet that historic fulfillment of the past becomes in turn a prophecy of a further and greater fulfillment yet to come. This kind of double fulfillment is not unique to the book of Daniel. There are several other places in Scripture where we have it. Perhaps the most familiar to us is in the New Testament, when Jesus, addressing his disciples, predicted the fall of Jerusalem which occurred only forty years later when the Roman armies came in 70 A.D. and took the city. He had predicted that capture most clearly. But, in turn, that historical fulfillment was a picture of a far larger and more savage attack upon Jerusalem which is yet to come, when the nations will again ring the city and Jerusalem will once again fall. At that time its deliverance will be by the return of Jesus Christ again to the Mount of Olives. Thus we have an historic fulfillment which in turn becomes a prediction of another event. That is exactly what we find in the eighth chapter of Daniel.

The chapter falls very easily into two parts. First, there is the vision which the prophet had, and its historic fulfillment. It will help us to see how history records the accurate fulfillment of this vision for it will give us added confidence in the word of God. Second we shall look at the future application of this which may well prove to be immediately before us in time.

In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the capital, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision, and I was at the river Ulai. {Dan 8:1-2 RSV}

This gives us the time and locale of the vision. It was two years after the vision recorded in Chapter 7. This new vision came in the third year of Belshazzar while Babylon was yet in power, before the Medes and Persians had come in. Daniel is, either in vision or in person, in the capital of Persia, Susa, and standing by the river Ulai. This seems to indicate that he is about to witness the flow of power from Persia toward the West, which had been predicted clearly in Daniel's previous visions.

Now we come to the first part of the visions:

I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the river. It had two horns; and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward; no beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power; he did as he pleased and magnified himself. {Dan 8:3-4 RSV}

We do not need to wonder what this means. In this case we have it clearly interpreted for us by the angel Gabriel, as Daniel indicates a further on.

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the

banks of the Ulai and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I was frightened and fell upon my face But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

As he was speaking to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and set me on my feet He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation; for it pertains to the appointed time of the end. As for the ram which you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia." {Dan 8:15-20 RSV}

That is very clear and definite is it not? The interpreting angel has identified this great ram as the Medio-Persian empire which was to follow Babylon upon the scene of world power. And yet, though he does definitely identify it historically, he also uses certain suggestive phrases which indicate that there is also to be a far distant fulfillment. For instance, he says that it will apply to "the time of the end," and that phrase is consistently used in Scripture as referring to the end immediately preceding the return of Christ. Also the angel calls it "the latter time of the indignation." The indignation, as used in Scripture, refers to God's indignation over his people Israel. It links with another phrase that appears in the prophets, which designates that period of time which Jesus called "the great tribulation," as "the time of Jacob 's trouble," the time when Israel will again undergo the indignation of God. Finally, one other phrase in Verse 19 speaks of "the appointed time of the end," and this too suggests some further future fulfillment beyond the time of the Medio-Persian empire.

Let us now return to the rest of the vision.

As I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the river, and he ran at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns; and the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled upon him; and there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the he-goat magnified himself exceedingly; but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. {Dan 8:5-8 RSV}

Again the interpreting angel makes this symbolism clear. In Verses 21-22 it is explained:

"And the he-goat is the king of Greece; and the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power." {Dan 8:21-22 RSV}

We know from history that this is a description of the rise of the Grecian empire under Alexander the Great, which to us is ancient history. The brilliant son of Philip of Macedon in his late teens became the leader of his father's armies. He swept through Greece and conquered that area and then challenged the power of Persia. In several great battles he overcame the Persian armies. They were quite unable to stand before him, as this vision depicts. Alexander conquered the lands of Persia and Babylon, then swept south toward Egypt.

There is an interesting footnote to history which comes in here. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that as Alexander the Great moved toward Egypt with his armies he came near the city of Jerusalem. He threatened to take the city, but when the high priests in Jerusalem knew that Alexander was near they took copies of the book of Daniel and went out to meet him. Josephus tells us that they showed Alexander this very prophecy. When Alexander saw that it had been clearly predicted that he would overcome the Persian armies and become the ruler of the world, he decided to spare the city of Jerusalem and instead enriched it. There is no confirmation of this incident from other historians, but it is true that Alexander did not capture Jerusalem but did enrich the city. This may well be one of the earliest and most interesting applications of prophecy to specific events.

Historians know that Alexander the Great went on to Babylon after subduing Egypt and at the age of 33, indulged himself in a great drunken feast with his generals and died of a combination of malaria and acute

alcoholism. Though conqueror of the world, he was unable to conquer his own passions. So, at the age of 33 he died, and as this passage indicates, the great horn was broken and four horns rose in its place. These are a picture of the four generals among whom Alexander's kingdom was divided. This is all fulfilled in history.

We have still more history:

Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven; and some of the host of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them. It magnified itself, even up to the Prince of the host; and the continual burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And the host was given over to it together with the continual burnt offering through transgression; and truth was cast down to the ground, and the horn acted and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to the one that spoke, "For how long is the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to him, "For two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state." {Dan 8:9-14 RSV}

This too has already been fulfilled. We know that one of the four generals of Alexander who shared the division of the kingdom was named Seleucus. He took as his portion the kingdom of Syria including much of Asia Minor, or Turkey, as it is known today. Another of the generals, Ptolemy, took Egypt. These two generals soon had become bitter enemies. History records a longstanding controversy between the two dynasties, Syria to the north of Palestine, and Egypt on the south. They fought back and forth using Palestine as the battlefield for a long period of time.

The eighth king in the dynasty of the Seleucids was a man named Antiochus Epiphanes, who reigned from about 170 B.C. His capital city was Antioch and was named for him. (Antioch appears in the New Testament as the place where believers were first called Christians, {Acts 11:26}.) This man, Antiochus Epiphanes (Epiphanes means "great"). was such a wicked and vicious individual that the Jews nicknamed him "Antiochus Epimanes," a play on his name. Epimanes means "Madman," and it was thus they identified him. He struggled with Egypt as did his predecessors before him and, in the course of his warfare, he conquered Jerusalem. Because he was angered at the Jews for some insult they had given him, he defied the high priests and entered into the sacred temple. That is described here by the phrase, "It [the little horn] magnified itself, even to the Prince of the host [the high priest]." He actually erected a pagan altar in the temple at Jerusalem and offered upon it a sow in sacrifice, an unclean animal. He took the broth of the sow and sprinkled it throughout the sanctuary, thus defiling the whole sanctuary. Then, as a final insult, he erected a statue of Jupiter in the holy place.

This, of course, brought to an end the twice-daily sacrifice called "the continual burnt offering," which Daniel here predicted was to be taken away for a definite period of time. The text says that it shall be taken away for "two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings." Many have misread that to mean twenty-three hundred days; but it does not mean days, and it does not say days. What it refers to is not days, but sacrifices. The continual burnt offering was offered once each evening and once each morning every day, so twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings is eleven-hundred and fifty days, just a little over three years.

Anyone who has read the apocryphal Book of the Maccabees knows, Jewish history records that the offering was taken away for a period of a little over three years. Finally, Judas Maccabaeus and his sons rose in revolt and led the people of Israel to retake Jerusalem, cleansed the sanctuary and restored the offerings at the end of eleven-hundred and fifty days, exactly as predicted. It is all history, but I do not want to dwell on it longer for I want to come to that which has application to us. We might think that this ancient fulfillment ended the matter, were it not for these suggestive phrases of the angel we noted before, and for the fact that the Lord Jesus himself, in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, refers to this very prophecy. In Verse 13 of Daniel 8 we read an unusual phrase, "For how long is the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate..." or, more literally, "the abomination of desolation."

In the twenty-fourth of Matthew the Lord Jesus, speaking of a yet coming time, said to the disciples "when

you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place" {Matt 24:15}, then, he said, they would know it is time to get out of the city. Do not waste any time, he urges, do not even go back for your coat, just go, because then shall be great tribulation such as has not been since the world began. Now that was spoken more than one hundred and sixty-five years after Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated the temple, so it clearly establishes a yet future fulfillment of this historic event.

With that in mind, let us turn to what the angel says about this future fulfillment:

"And at the latter end of their rule, when the transgressors have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great, and he shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people of the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall magnify himself. Without warning he shall destroy many; and he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes; but, by no human hand, he shall be broken. The vision of the evenings and the mornings which has been told is true; but seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence."
{Dan 8:23-26 RSV}

There are two factors here that mark the time of this fulfillment.

Notice, the angel says that it shall be "at the latter end of their rule," i.e., the rulers that would control the area of the country once dominated by Antiochus Epiphanes. It will be in the latter end of their rule. This suggests strongly the reappearance of the nation Syria in history. It is very striking that a nation of Syria did not exist for centuries until 1944 when the French mandate over this area was dissolved and Syria once again appeared as a nation in the midst of the world. Its history as a modern nation dates only from 1944.

Second, we are told here that it would be a time "when the transgressors had reached their full measure." This suggests the final crisis of history when transgression, or, as it is described in other places, corruption and violence, lawlessness, is so widespread and so intense that, as Jesus said in the Olivetti Discourse, it would be once again like the days of Noah. This was the characteristic mark of the days of Noah, widespread corruption and violence over the earth.

At that time a very singular individual appears. According to the description here he has two outstanding personal characteristics.

First, he is bold in appearance; "fierce" is the way it is translated in some versions. He has a commanding presence, a very intense personality, with a strong, magnetic appeal to people, thus, bold in his countenance.

Second, he is highly knowledgeable; he has the ability to understand riddles. This does not mean he enjoys conundrums or that he is good at riddle games. This is really a word describing the enigmas of life, the mysteries of life. He is a skilled psychologist, if you like. He understands what makes people tick, why they behave the way they do, and how society is structured. Using this knowledge he is able to influence people powerfully.

There are two methods of his operation revealed to us here. We are told that "his power shall be great." In the RSV there is reference to a footnote here which gives the literal Hebrew. For some reason the revisers left this Hebrew passage out of the text, but in the Hebrew it adds these words, "but not with his power." His power shall be great, but not with his own power. We learn from this that he will exercise derived power, power not his own. He borrows it from another source. But it will be great power, and will result, we are told, in fearful and widespread destruction. Especially will it be aimed against "the people of the saints," those who honor and love God in that day.

Just as we found that the little horn of Chapter 7 (the Roman political ruler who heads the Western confederacy of nations in the last day) was to be identified in Chapter 13 of the book of Revelation as the first beast, so we will find that this little horn of Chapter 8 is also identified in Revelation 13. In Verse 11 of Chapter 13 in Revelation, John says,

Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence [i.e., it has derived power; it derives it from another being], and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. {Rev 13:11-12 RSV}

Here is another individual who exercises power in conjunction with the great political ruler of the last day. Now come back to Daniel, and let us recall the second characteristic of the little horn in Chapter 8.

"By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall magnify himself. Without warning he shall destroy many; and he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes; but, by no human hand, he shall be broken." {Dan 8:25 RSV}

Plainly this man is marked by his ability to control others by deceitful propaganda. He makes deceit to prosper, which is a clear description of propaganda. He is the great propagandist. We are not told exactly how he does it (perhaps by mimeographing his messages and distributing them around!) but he influences many in various ways.

If we turn again to Revelation 13 we will find how this accords exactly with the second beast:

It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men [in these days of space stations and nuclear power, this is certainly believable]; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. {Rev 13:13-17 RSV}

What a remarkable propaganda accomplishment, by which men are deceived and made to believe something that is not true. The "image" is very significant here. Remember that Antiochus Epiphanes, back in history, defiled the sanctuary by erecting an image of Jupiter. Put these passages together and it appears to me that we have a clear description of what occurs in the last days. There has always been a question among Bible scholars as to which of these two beasts in Revelation 13 is actually the Antichrist. In my judgment, the answer is: The first one.

It is his image, made to be alive, i.e., given a form of life (perhaps this suggests something of what scientists will be able to accomplish in their efforts to produce life), which will be erected by the second beast in the temple to be built in Jerusalem and thus will be the "abomination which makes desolate," which, Jesus said, will be the mark to indicate the beginning of the terrible judgment of God. If that is the case, we can see how these two personages work closely together, the one a great political power whose image appears in the temple to be worshipped as God though he does not personally appear there, but all is done by the agency of the second beast who is the fulfillment of the little horn of Daniel 8.

Now, according to Daniel, "he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes." This can be none other than Jesus Christ himself. He is given the title, King of kings and Lord of lords, and Prince of the kings of the earth, in the New Testament. This second beast, the little horn of Daniel 8, faces, therefore, the same doom as the first beast of Revelation 13. Their mutual fate is described in Revelation 19:

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse [that is Jesus Christ] and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. {Rev 19:19-20 RSV}

Thus "by no human hand he is broken." Daniel and John, writing six hundred years apart, both detail for us these two powerful figures who will deceive and amaze the whole world at the time of the end.

Returning to Daniel now, attention is called to the effect this vision had upon Daniel himself.

And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I rose and went about the king's business; but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it. {Dan 8:27 RSV}

There is something highly suggestive here. This great prophet was sickened by what he saw was to happen on earth, but he did not let that stop him; he rose and went about the king's business.

When I read that I could not help but think of the words of the Lord Jesus to his disciples when he outlined what would happen in the future. He said to them, "Occupy till I come" {Luke 19:13b KJV}, i.e., go about the king's business until the king returns.

Someone said to me the other day, "If I knew for sure that these were the last days, I would live a lot differently than I am."

Would you?

Well, it should not make any real difference. These events have been possible in any generation since the Lord's first appearance on earth. God could have touched the spring that released the forces that would bring about these events in any generation -- that is why every generation has expected it in its time -- but since the Word of God reveals to us our responsibility in the light of these events, then every single Christian who has ever lived for these two thousand years will be judged as to whether he has taken them seriously or not. Whether it was the actual time of the last days or not does not really make any difference: the forces that ultimately produce these events have been at work in every generation, and the word has been given to us to make clear what our reaction to these should be.

It does not make any difference then whether we live in the actual last days or not; ***our reaction to this revelation*** will be what reveals how much we believe God and are faithful.

That highlights to me the great question which confronts us as we come to the Lord's table, the question I am facing anew in my own life these days: How available am I to God? How much have I yielded myself to the rights of the Lord Jesus in my life? Have I presented my body as a living sacrifice unto him?

Paul said in Second Corinthians 5, "we are not to live any longer to ourselves but unto him who for us died and was raised again," {cf, 2 Cor 5:15 KJV}. "We are bought with a price," {cf, 1 Cor 6:20}. We no longer belong to ourselves, we no longer have the right to run our lives as we please.

This is the great announcement of the Word of God. We have been bought with a price, we are no longer our own. Therefore, the only reasonable thing we can do is to present ourselves to him to use in his work. That is what gives life real meaning. That is what gives it worthwhileness and value in the light of eternity. So the question I leave with you as we come to this hour is this:

Have you presented your body to him to teach, to help, to love, to learn, to pray, to play, for his name's sake?

Prayer:

Our Father, help us to take these words very seriously. We know how many times throughout the Scriptures the disciples were rebuked, and quite justly so, because they did not take seriously what you said. The Lord Jesus had to rebuke the cities in which he preached because they would not change their attitudes in view of what he had said to them. Lord, keep us from being stubborn, rebellious people. Rather, help us to yield ourselves anew to you,

knowing that there can be no greater glory, no greater joy, no greater privilege than being your instrument in these days. Grant that we may right now, each one of us, beginning with the youngest to the oldest, re-present ourselves to you, Lord Jesus, to be your instrument, knowing that as we make ourselves available to you, you will make yourself available to us. Then the glory of your great Person and Being will be manifest in us. We ask this in your name, Amen.

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