

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 25, Number 26

July 12, 2009



A Troubling Vision

And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be. 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. And his 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 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. And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days. 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. (Daniel 8:15-27)

In the first fourteen verses of Chapter Eight Daniel describes the details of a mysterious vision or dream that he had. Our study verses give us the angel's explanation of that vision to Daniel. The angel clearly associates parts of Daniel's vision with the first three world powers that frame Daniel's writings; Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The specific details of this dream that troubled Daniel so deeply occur during the later era of Grecian rule.

This passage serves as a beautiful example of God's precise description of future events in Biblical prophecy. We refer to this divine ability as omniscience, God's all-knowing every thought, word, and deed of human history, past, present, and future. God knows the future as fully and accurately as He knows the past. I do not refer to this divine attribute as foreknowledge, because Scripture uses foreknowledge to identify God's advance love of His chosen people, not of His timeless and all-encompassing knowledge of all events. We confuse our readers and hearers less and make our beliefs far more clear to them when we respect Bible terms and use them as the Bible uses them.¹

¹ A sad example of the non-Biblical use of a Biblical term is the word "perseverance." The word appears only once in the New Testament

(Ephesians 6:18), and is there used as an exhortation to faithfulness in our prayers. However, the word is often used in our day to refer to the errant belief that God irresistibly and effectually decreed our every act of faith and obedience to some imaginary and never clearly defined minimal degree of progressive obedience. Advocates of this non-Biblical—I offer, a view that contradicts Biblical teaching—idea never define this imaginary degree of obedience, offering instead that anyone who fails to live up to this undefined level of progressive obedience are "not really born again in the first place." If we simply use the term "perseverance" as it appears in our King James Bible in the context of exhortation, we would readily avoid this grievous error. To suggest that every regenerate elect person shall by divine and irresistible decree advance in holiness till death is equivalent to saying that any child in our natural family shall always surely remain faithful to some unspecified degree to the family's values, a point often clearly refuted by rebellious children who, despite their parents' faithful upbringing, choose a lifestyle that dishonors their parents. Advocates of this errant view of progressive sanctification would be logically forced to tell this rebellious child that he/she is not really a part of

A brief survey of the history of ancient Greece will confirm every detail of that country's history that God gave to Daniel hundreds of years before the events actually occurred. Upon Alexander's death (the "rough goat" or first king in Daniel's vision), his expanded country was divided between four of his leading generals, precisely what Daniel sees in God's revelation.

What about this vision and the future events that God reveals to Daniel were so disturbing to our prophet? Who was this king "...of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences..." who appeared in the later era of Grecian dominion? D. A. Carson offers a view that is rather widely accepted regarding this prophecy.

Syria, one of the four divisions into which Alexander the Great's empire fragmented, was governed by Seleucus Nicator, head of the Seleucid dynasty from which Antiochus IV emerged in 175 BC. He took the title Theos Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus, the Illustrious God). Others referred to him as Epimanes ('the madman'). In his expansionist policy he overran Palestine (*the Beautiful Land*; 9) and sacked Jerusalem amid terrible bloodshed. He abolished the daily morning and evening sacrificial offerings (11; cf. Ex. 29:38–43) and committed the blasphemy of sacrificing a pig on the altar of burnt offering, later placing a statue of Zeus in the temple and making human sacrifices on the altar. He forbade circumcision and profaned the Sabbath (cf. vs 11–12).²

Though Daniel may not have seen the full details of Antiochus' atrocities against his beloved people and their God, he saw enough to be troubled deeply.

...but he shall be broken without hand. Despite this evil man's despicable sins against the Jewish people and their temple, he did not—he could not—succeed. When people stand up against God, they inevitably predict their downfall. God shall always have the last word.

Matthew Henry's commentary provides a rather gory and detailed description of Antiochus'

the family, despite the fact that both Mother and Father were present in the delivery ward when the child was born to them.

cf. compare

²D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, Rev. Ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd Ed. / Edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Da 8:9.

final days, a clear fulfillment of his death, not at the hands of man, but in defeat and under the judgment of the "Prince of princes," God Himself, whom he had so fiercely opposed.

He shall be broken without hand, that is, without the hand of man. He shall not be slain in war, nor shall he be assassinated, as tyrants commonly were, but he shall fall into the hand of the living God and die by an immediate stroke of his vengeance. He, hearing that the Jews had cast the image of Jupiter Olympius out of the temple, where he had placed it, was so enraged at the Jews that he vowed he would make Jerusalem a *common burial-place*, and determined to march thither immediately; but no sooner had he spoken these proud words than he was struck with an incurable plague in his bowels; worms bred so fast in his body that whole flakes of flesh sometimes dropped from him; his torments were violent, and the stench of his disease such that none could endure to come near him. He continued in this misery very long. At first he persisted in his menaces against the Jews; but at length, despairing of his recovery, he called his friends together, and acknowledged all those miseries to have fallen upon him for the injuries he had done to the Jews and his profaning the temple at Jerusalem. Then he wrote courteous letters to the Jews, and vowed that if he recovered he would let them have the free exercise of their religion. But, finding his disease grow upon him, when he could no longer endure his own smell, he said, *It is meet to submit to God, and for man who is mortal not to set himself in competition with God*, and so died miserably in a strange land, on the mountains of Pacata near Babylon: so Ussher's *Annals*, A.M. 3840, about 160 years before the birth of Christ.³

Fulfillment of the events in Daniel's vision occurred within the scope and time of the four governments that frame Daniel's prophecies. While Daniel shall eventually reflect on God's final Day of Judgment, he here reflects more on the specific prophecy revealed to him in this vision. Carson again offers wise words regarding fulfillment of this prophecy.

Two phrases point toward the fulfillment of Daniel's vision: these events will take place *later in the time of wrath ... the appointed time*

³Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991), Da 8:15.

of the end (19) and in *the distant future* (26).
The 'end' in view here is best taken as the last part of the period of history under review (*i.e.* not the end of the ages).⁴

Few studies are as rich in urging our awe and worship of God as His consistent—and consistently accurate—revelations in Bible prophecy. While it is sadly commonplace in our time for Bible teachers to indulge in fantasy and extravagant claims regarding God, the Bible, and contemporary history, the Bible indeed does present us with one masterpiece after another of precise prophecies, along with their fulfillment, typically verified, or verifiable by the testimony of Scripture, as well as by authentic historical records.

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⁴D. A. Carson...Da 8:9.