A STERN-FACED KING

Daniel 8:1-27

Key Verse: 25

“In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise.”

In the last lesson, chapter 7, Daniel had his first vision. This vision was the prophecy that showed the panorama of the whole history of the future world from Daniel’s life to the return of Jesus Christ. In that vision, we thought of the four world empires depicted as beasts: lion-like Babylonia, bear-like Medo-Persia, leopard-like Grace, and Rome as a terrifying and frightening beast. The point of this prophecy was that the fourth beast representing Rome had ten horns and among them a little horn came up, which referred to the final antichrist and would be destroyed. Then there was the coronation of one like a son of man, Christ, who would receive a kingdom with an everlasting dominion. This was the heart and soul of Daniel’s vision, and the saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever. In today’s passage, chapter 8, Daniel had his second vision. This vision focuses on the final antichrist, whose power and character were vividly displayed by his two prefigures, who would appear in history before the first coming of Christ. And this vision is directly related to Israel. It is known that from chapter 2 verse 4 to the end of chapter 7, the language in the book of Daniel is Aramaic, the language of Babylon, because the message was primarily directed to the Gentiles. But all of a sudden, from chapter 8 it changes back to Hebrew. In this passage, Daniel will be speaking about the times of the Gentiles as they relate to Israel. We’re going to consider not only that final Antichrist, but the two individuals, forerunners to the ultimate ruler of the world. We are again amazed that world history has been going on according to the prophecy of God. How blessed are they who live by the word of God and are prepared for such a time and help others to prepare for it. May we receive this blessing.

In verses 1 and 2 Daniel says, “In the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.” In these verses the word “vision” is written 3 times. This vision was not shown in a dream but while Daniel was awake and he himself was in the vision. In that vision, Daniel was transported to Susa, a town of little significance, beside the Ulai Canal. It was located about 400 km directly east of Babylon, and about 200 km north of the Persian Gulf. After Daniel’s time, Susa became the royal city of the Medes and the Persians (Esther 1:2).

Now the vision starts in verses 3 and 4: “I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.” In the interpretation of the vision, verse 20 says, “The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.” The ram in ancient times, symbolized the Persian empire. The composite Persian empire had two parts, the Medes and the Persians. That’s why it was known as the Medo-Persian empire. Before this empire, Media was already a major power in the world. In fact, Media had helped the Babylonian empire conquer Assyria in 612 BC. Media was a pretty big horn. And there was a little horn - Persia. Persia was relatively insignificant; a very small country, lying to the south, out in the middle of a wilderness. But When Cyrus came to power in Persia, it began to grow. And though he started much later than the Medes, he finally conquered Media in 550 BC, and made Persia the greater of the two. And so, when the two were combined, with Persia being the greater though it started smaller, he established the Medo-Persian empire. It is the empire of the east and expanded defeating the Babylonian kingdom and other surrounding nations. No power could stand against him. When Cyrus set up the Medo-Persian empire, he was an absolute tyrant. In just ten years, from 549 to 539, he conquered the world of his time.

Then in verses 5-8 Daniel continues, “As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at him in great rage. I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power. The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.” According to verse 21, “The shaggy goat is the king/kingdom of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king.” Goats have two horns. But this goat had one horn, like a unicorn, coming out between his eyes. It was described as a prominent horn and a large horn (5, 8, 21). We know that the first king of the Greecian empire was Alexander. Alexander the Great was a military genius, perhaps the greatest military genius of all of human history. He was born in 356 BC, long, long after Daniel. He was the son of a great conqueror, a man by the name of Philip of Macedon, who had already united Greece and Macedonia. Philip was a powerful man and planned to fight Medo-Persia, moving east, but he was murdered. After his murder, his son, Alexander, decided to take up his cause. Alexander was 21 years old when he became king in 336. He was educated under Aristotle. He was brilliant. In 334, two years after he became king, he marshaled an army, and started an attack on the Medes and the Persians. The powerful Medo-Persian kingdom symbolized with ram was terribly defeated by him. He conquered the world from Europe to India in 10 years, so speedily that the expression was without touching the ground. However, interestingly since he left the homeland for the conquest of the world of that time, he never came back home, because he died at a party, and that was the end of his reign. He died in a drunken stupor, very possibly having choked on his own vomit.

As we studied in chapter 7, the four generals after the death of Alexander were Cassander, Lysimachurs, Seleucus, and Ptolomy. Cassander took the west: that was Macedonia and Greece. Lysimachus took the north: Thrace, Bithynia, and Asia Minor. Seleucus took the east: Syria, Babylonia. And Ptolemy took the south: Egypt, Israel, Arabia. However, it took 22 years - 22 years of the most incredible intrigues, and the most unbelievable historical events, until the kingdom was divided into four. There were 22 years of subterfuge and infighting among all the generals of Alexander, that finally ended with four. And there was a fifth named Antigonus, but at the very last moment, he was defeated so that in the end, there were only four. If there had been five, God’s prophecy would have not been fulfilled and the Bible would have been remained not reliable as the book of lies. However, the Bible was accurately fulfilled, even in this matter. Again, what a prophecy! What a book of the prophecy with 100% accuracy!

Then in verses 9-12 Daniel says, “Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low. Because of rebellion, the host of saints and the daily sacrifice were given over it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.” In retrospect of history, another horn, which started small and grew in power is Antiochus, who was the eighth ruler in Seleuses dynasty. He rose from littleness, out of insignificance. He ascended the throne following the murder of his brother, the rightful heir, Seleucus Philopator, who at that time was a hostage in Rome. Antiochus took the throne, even when he didn’t deserve it. Chaper 11 verse 21 says, “He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honour of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.” Once he was crowned, he gave himself the name Epiphanes, and the people called him Epimanes, which means “the maniac”. He swept to the south, and made great gains in Egypt. He swept to the east, in Mesopotamia, and toward the beautiful land (11:16, 41), Israel. He reigned from 175 BC to 161 BC, in what is known as the intertestamental period. The Old Testament shut down at 400 BC until the time of Christ. Those 400 years were a Biblical time of silence. It was in that time that this Greek power dominated the land of Israel, and at that time, this man Antiochus rose to a place of prominence. The land of Palestine had been under the control of the Ptolemies. But at around 195 BC, Antiochus’ father took Palestine into the possession of the Seleucids. So, when Antiochus came to reign, it belonged to the Seleucid territory. This basically means that the Seleucids, who were extremely Greek in their culture, began to impose upon the land of Palestine a very Greek approach to life. They wanted to do everything they could to destroy their Jewishness. The Seleucids began to really put pressure on the Jews to become Hellenized. And when Antiochus became the king after his father, he pursued this end even more aggressively.

Antiochus even got a Greek to become the high priest, and then he tries to dominate the Jewish people with Greek culture. Verse 10 says, “It grew until it reached the host of heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.” The stary hosts seem to refer to the obedient, faithful people of God as described in 12:3, “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” If any Jew participated in a Jewish ceremony, keeping the Sabbath, performing circumcision, offering a sacrifice, the penalty was death. When he found a mother who circumcised a child, he slew the baby, and tied the baby around the mother’s neck, marched her right through the middle of town to the edge of town, and threw her over a cliff to be crushed to death.

Verse 11 tells us something of further explanation in regard to his anti-Jewish activities: “It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low.” The Prince of the host is none other than God Himself, while the host are his people. King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be as one people, and everyone should abandon his customs. All the heathen agreed to the commandment of the king. And many of the Israelites found pleasure in his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the Sabbath. He slaughtered a pig on the altar and set up the god Zeus in the Holy of Holies. He just literally devastated the whole Jewish system; just devastated the people of God; utterly devastated them. He killed 80,000 Jews, sold 40,000 more into slavery, plundered the temple, dedicated it to his idols.

In verse 12, “Because of rebellion, the host of the saints, and the daily sacrifice were given over to it.” Here the host of the saints could be a portion of God’s people, apostate, traitors, who joined Antiochus in the slaughter of their own people. The reason they did this might be because they were such evil transgressors. Verse 12 says continually, “It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.” Truth is certainly God’s word written in the Scriptures.

Then how long does this horrible holocaust go? In verses 13-14 Daniel says, “Then I heard a holy one speaking and another holy one said to him, ‘How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?’ He said to me, ‘It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.” We can say that the holy ones are the angels. According to these words of prophecy, Antiochus would oppress the Jews for 2,300 days. The closing of such days would be the sanctuary cleansed. Then what happened in history was that on December 25th, 165 BC, under the leadership of one of the Maccabees, Judas Maccabeus, the great leader of that family, who led the revolution against Antiochus, came in and cleansed the temple. Going backwards from that day we wind up at September 6th, 171 BC. That would be the date when some event occurred that was sufficient enough to mark the beginning of Antiochus’ anti-Jewish atrocities/massacres. We don’t have any record of what happened on that day, but we can believe that something did happen, because God knows his numbers. One thing is clear that the Jewish atrocities began in 171 BC. Historians say that until 171 BC there was peace between Antiochus and the Jews. Again, what a fulfillment of the Scriptures! Amazing prophecy!

Then in verses 15-17 Daniel says, “While, I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, ‘Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.’ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate.” This was the natural response of human beings at the appearance of supernatural beings like angels, especially Gabriel here, the most powerful angel. We see this also in Revelation, John’s response to an angel (Rev 19:10; 22:8). Daniel continues, “‘Son of man,’ he said to me, ‘understand that the vision concerns the time of the end.’ While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep (I fainted), with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised to my feet. He said: ‘I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.’” When we think of Daniel’s vision, we see that the vision was fulfilled in history as we thought of. Alexander had come and gone, and Antiochus. However, Gabriel clearly said that the vision concerned the end of the time and again, the appointed time of the end. Gabriel also mentioned, “I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath.” Here wrath or indignation refers to God’s anger toward Israel, over their sin, their disobedience. Because of their disobedience and sin, God is indignant with his people for the purpose of chastening them. The time of wrath is the time of tribulation in Revelation, during which God’s wrath would be poured out. The second half is the time of the great tribulation.

Then here our question remains: how Daniel’s vision is related to the end of the time. We can understand it in that Alexander the Great and Antiochus the Great are prefigures of the final antichrist, two preliminary antichrists. The final one would be like Alexander in terms of power and like Antiochus in terms of character, wickedness. The final antichrist will not be a spirit but a real man. So after saying that the vision concerns the time of the end, the angels mentions Alexander the first king of Greece kingdom and Antiochus related to verses 23, “In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise.”

Charles Ross Weede (1880-) compared Alexander to Jesus.

“Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;

One lived and died for self; one died for you and me.

The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross.

One’s life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss.

One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone;

One shed a whole world’s blood; the other gave His own.

One won the world in life and lost it all in death; The other lost His life to win the whole world’s faith.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;

One died in Babylon; and one at Calvary.

One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave;

One conquered every tongue; the other every grave.

The one made himself god; the other made Himself less.

The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless.

When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords; But Jesus died to live forever Lord of Lords.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;

The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.

One built a throne on blood; the other built on love,

The one was born of earth; the other from above;

One won all this earth, to lose all earth and heaven; The other gave up all, that all to Him be given. The Greek forever died; the Jew forever lives.

He loses all who gets, and wins all things who gives.”

Charles Ross Weede points to the fact that there is no comparison.

In verses 23, “In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise”, this king was first reflected in Antiochus and then in the final antichrist. “When the rebels have come completely wicked” is “when the transgressors are come to the full” (KJV). It is the time when transgression has come to its apex and its fullness. A stern-faced king is a king of fierce countenance. Countenance has to do with his face, his demeanor, his personality. He will be fierce, strong and vehement. And “a man of intrigue” or “understanding dark sentences” can mean that he appears to solve the problems of the world.

And verse 24 says, “He will become very strong, but not by his own power.” Revelation 13:2 says, “…The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.” He is energized by Satan. He is a Satan-dwelt individual. He will be far worse than an Antiochus, and far more powerful than an Alexander. Verse 24 continues, “He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people.” In KJV, “…he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.” “Astounding devastation” or “destroy wonderfully” surely does not mean good. It means that the world will be full of wonder at the power of his destruction and devastation. And he will be successful, like Antiochus was, and he’ll destroy the mighty and the holy people.

And verse 25 says, “He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes.” In KJV, “

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.” “Through his policy” literally means his cunning. His cunning is linked to deceit. By treachery, and deceit, and cunning, he will accomplish his purposes. He will be a deceitful, treacherous, wise, brilliant, Satanically-indwelt genius. He will magnify himself. He will take his stand against the Prince of princes, that is, Christ. “Yet he will be destroyed but not by human power.” He will be destroyed when Christ comes in power and glory and shatters him. This is also as we thought of little horn that came from the final form of the Roman Empire. In 7:25, “He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set time and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half of a time. But the court will be sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed.” Paul also said about the antichrist this way in 2 Thessalonians 2, “…for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction (the son of perdition). He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up on God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God….And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overflow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming.”

And in verses 26 Daniel says, “The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.” Again, it stated three time that the vision concerns the time of the end, the appointed time of the end, and the distant future. Again, the main point of this passage is not just about the Greece empire defeating the empire of Medo-Persia or the story of Alexander and Antiochus but the final antichrist in the end time. Truly God sees the end from the beginning and everything in between.

Now Revelation 22:10 says, “…Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.” How important it is to have this biblical view of the worldly and live by it and spread it as the time is nearer and nearer.

And verse 27 says, “I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.” May we learn Daniel’s sincere and aching heart before the vision of God, as we know the end of time is coming closer and closer.

At this point, how thankful we are for Christ and his kingdom and our victory in Christ Jesus. Our king Jesus is also quite different from the stern-faced king. He is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace. He is King of peace and righteousness and salvation, King of love, true and perfect love, King of power, and King of wisdom and wonder. He is the everlasting king, never to be destroyed. May we live under his kingship in his kingdom serve his kingdom work, as we wait and prepare for the time of the end, discerning the stern-faced king and his kinds.