

The Interpretation of the Vision

Crucial to the interpretation of Daniel 8:9-14 is the identification of the little horn power, which dominates these verses. Attempting to identify this little horn, commentators have applied three different methods (preterist, futurist, and historicist) of prophetic interpretation to the texts.

Preterists teach that the majority Daniel's prophecies have already been fulfilled and, therefore, have no present significance. They hold that the little horn rose from one of the divisions of Alexander's empire; they specifically identify it with the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.).

Futurists follow this basic line of interpretation as well, though they see Antiochus as a type of an end-time antichrist appearing in the final years of earth's history.

Historicists declare that the prophecies in Daniel portray an outline of human and ecclesiastical history from ancient Babylon down to the end of time, with the little horn power being identified as the Roman Empire, in both its pagan and papal stages.

Just as there are three main identifications for the little horn, three main applications have been made of the time period—the 2300 “evening-mornings” in Daniel 8:14—which involves the activity of the little horn. Preterists have proposed that the 2300 “evening-mornings” means 2300 individual morning and evening sacrifices, or 1150 literal days, which should be applied to Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Some futurists have seen the “evening-mornings” as literal evenings and mornings, or 2300 days, but place them in the future, during the time of an end-time antichrist. Utilizing the day-for-a-year principle, historicists have held that this time prophecy refers to a period of 2300 years, which began sometime in the fifth century B.C. and ended in the nineteenth century A.D.

Finally, how do the various schools interpret the sanctuary that's cleansed at the end of the time period depicted in Daniel 8:14? Preterists claim it refers to the purification of the temple in Jerusalem after Antiochus polluted it. Futurists hold that during the final seven years of earth's history a literal temple (to be rebuilt in Jerusalem) will be polluted by an antichrist but cleansed, or restored, when Christ comes. In contrast, because the earthly temple was destroyed in AD. 70 (and this prophetic time period extends beyond this point), historicists see in it a reference to the cleansing of the temple in heaven.

The best way to understand the prophecy is to study it in context of other chapters in Daniel that parallel it, particularly Daniel 7. By comparing these two chapters, we can learn not only which school of prophetic thought best explains the vision of Daniel 8, but we can see why the identification of the little horn as Antiochus Epiphanes simply isn't tenable.

DANIEL 7

With the exception of some voices within the preterist camp, most conservative scholars depict the identity of the four beasts in Daniel 7 as follows:

(Lion) Babylon

(Bear) Media-Persia

(Leopard) Greece

(Beast with iron teeth) Rome

Historicists and futurists do diverge, however, when they come to the little horn that arises out of the fourth power, Rome (Daniel 7:8-9, 20-21, 24-25).

The former identify it as the papal horn, which came out of pagan Rome; the latter, holding to a gap in the flow of prophetic history, identify it as the still future anti-Christ.

While acknowledging (as all the schools do) that the first beast is Babylon, the preterist interpretation identifies the second and third beast of Daniel 7 as Media and then Persia, with the fourth beast being Greece (which arises after Persia) and the little horn coming out of Greece as Antiochus Epiphanes. This argument, however, falls apart on numerous grounds, including the lack of historical data to warrant that separation of Media and Persia into two successive kingdoms.

In contrast, support for the interpretation of Daniel 7 as being Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome can be found in the interpretation of the ram in Daniel 8. Its two disproportionate horns are specifically identified as the kings of Media and Persia together (vs. 20), reflective of the duality found in the prophet's view of the bear in Daniel 7, which was raised up one side (Daniel 7:5). Meanwhile, the three-directional nature of the ram's conquests (Daniel 8:4) also parallels the three ribs depicted in the mouth of the bear (Daniel 7:5), since it expanded to the north (Lydia), to the west (Babylon), and to the south (Egypt), an accurate description of the Media-Persian expansion.

Thus, if in Daniel 7 Media-Persia is the second beast, and Greece the third, then the nondescript beast, the fourth beast in the prophecy, must represent Rome, the great power that arose after Greece. Therefore, the little horn that came from this fourth beast cannot represent Antiochus IV, who arose prior to, and not after, Rome.

Thus, if the little horn in Daniel 8 is an entity that came out of Rome, not Greece, what is its relationship to the little horn in Daniel 7? Could the little horn in Daniel 8 still be Antiochus Epiphanes, even though the little horn in Daniel 7 cannot? Though it's certainly possible that it could be referring to two different powers, significant arguments exist in favor of identifying the little horns in these two chapters as the same historical entity.

- 1) Both are identified with the same symbol: a horn 7:8ff, Aramaic, qeren 8:9 ff, Hebrew qeren
- 2) Both are described as "little" at the outset. 7:8, Aramaic, zerath 8:9. Hebrew, serath
- 3) Both are described as becoming "great" later on. 7:20, Aramaic, rab 8:9ff, Hebrew, gadal
- 4) Both are described as persecuting powers. 7:21, 25; 8:10, 24
- 5) Both have the same target group as object of their persecution. 7: 27 "people of the saints, 8: 24 "people of the saints" Aramaic, am quaddise Hebrew, am qedosim Cf. vss. 21, 25
- 6) Both are described as self-exalting and blasphemous powers. 7:8, 11, 20, 25 8:10-12, 25
- 7) Both are described as crafty and intelligent. 7:8 "eyes of a man" 8:25 "cunning and deceit"
- 8) Both represent the final and greatest anti-God climax of their visions. 7:8-9, 21-22, 25-26 8:12-14, 25

- 9) Both have aspects of their work delineated by prophetic time. 7:25 8:13-14
- 10) The activities of both extend to the time of the end. 7:26-26, cf. 12:7-9 8:17, 19
- 11) Both are to be supernaturally destroyed. 7:11, 26 8:25

How much more evidence does one need? The little horn power of Daniel 7 and the littler horn power of Daniel 8 are both the same entity, and because the little horn in Daniel 7 cannot be Antiochus Epiphanes, the little horn in Daniel 8 can't be, either. Meanwhile, textual evidence within Daniel 8 itself also helps debunk the Antiochus interpretation for the little horn.

DANIEL 8

Because Antiochus IV is commonly identified with the little horn of Daniel 8, arguments favoring this identification will be considered first:

- 1) Antiochus was a Seleucid king. As one of this dynasty who assumed control in part of Alexander's old empire, Antiochus did proceed from the breakup of the Grecian empire after the death of Alexander.
- 2) Antiochus' succession was irregular. According to the chapter, this little horn arose, "but not with his power," which suggests that the little horn came to power through an irregular succession. A son of Seleucus IV should have succeeded to the rule after his father's assassination. However, the king's brother, Antiochus IV, came to the throne instead, aided by the armies of Pergamos. It is possible to apply the phrase "but not by his own power" to this course of events.
- 3) Antiochus persecuted the Jews.
- 4) Antiochus polluted the Jerusalem temple and disrupted its services. However, it remains to be seen whether he did all the things against the temple that Daniel 8 says the little horn did.

Meanwhile, there are a number of arguments from Daniel 8 against equating Antiochus IV with the little horn.

- 1) Comparative greatness of the little horn. In the chapter, the Persian ram "magnified himself" (8:4); the Grecian goat "magnified himself exceedingly" (8:8). By contrast the little horn magnified itself "exceedingly "in different directions. On the horizontal level it "grew exceedingly great" toward the south, east, and glorious land. On the vertical plane it "grew great . . . to the host of heaven," and ultimately "magnified itself . . . up to the Prince of the host" (8:9-11).

The verb "to be great," *gādal*, occurs only once each with Persia and Greece, but it appears three times with the little horn. In other words, the little horn was greater than the two powers that preceded it in the chapter, which means Antiochus IV should have exceeded the Media-Persian and Greek empires in greatness. Obviously, he didn't. He wasn't even close. Indeed, he ruled only one portion of the Grecian Empire, and did that with but little success. In this crucial point, Antiochus fails miserably.

- 2) Conquests. The horn "grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land."

a. To the south. The predecessor to Antiochus IV was the king who added Palestine to the territory ruled by the Seleucids when he defeated armies at Paneas in 198 B.C. Antiochus IV attempted to extend his southern frontier into Egypt with the campaign of 170-168 B.C. He was successful in conquering most of the Delta in 169 B.C. The following year (168 B.C.) he marched on Alexandria but was turned back by a Roman diplomatic mission and had to abandon his Egyptian conquests. Thus his partial success in Egypt was transitory, and it is doubtful that he really did grow “exceedingly great toward the south.”

b. To the east. Antiochus IV’s predecessor, not Antiochus IV himself, subjugated the east with his victorious campaigns of 210-206 B.C. that took him to the frontier of India. Most of the territories involved rebelled and became independent, however, after the Romans defeated him at Magnesia. Antiochus IV attempted to regain some of this territory. After some initial diplomatic and military successes, his forces stalled. He died during the course of these campaigns, apparently from natural causes, in the winter of 164/3 B.C. Antiochus IV did have some initial successes, he did not accomplish nearly as much in this area as his predecessor, and this project was left incomplete at Antiochus IV’s death. Thus his partial and incomplete military successes hardly match the prophetic prediction of the little horn “growing exceedingly great” toward the east.

c. To the glorious land. Antiochus IV is noted in 1 Maccabees 1-6 as the ruler who desecrated the temple and persecuted the Jews. This did not occur because of any conquest of his own, but because his predecessor had already taken Palestine. Antiochus IV, therefore, could not have “grown exceedingly great toward the glorious land” (Judea, presumably) in any sense of military conquest. He could have “[grown] exceedingly” only in the sense of exercising or abusing his control over what was already part of his kingdom when he came to the throne.

Indeed, not only was Antiochus IV not the conqueror of Palestine, but defeats of his forces toward the end of his reign in the region eventually led to the complete independence of Judea. While he was campaigning in the east, his Palestinian forces were beaten (1 Macc 3:57; 4:29) in Judea. Toward the end of 164 B.C. the Jews liberated the polluted temple from their hands and rededicated it (1 Macc 5:52). Antiochus died in the east shortly thereafter, early in 163 B.C. (1 Macc 6:15).

In short, the net results of what Antiochus accomplished in these three geographical spheres was negligible, even (in some cases) negative. Thus he hardly fits the specification of this prophecy, which states that the little horn was to grow “exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land.”

3) Anti-temple activities.

The phrase, “the place of his sanctuary was cast down” (8:11, KJV) indicates what was done to the temple building, God’s dwelling place itself, by the little horn. According to Daniel 8:11, it was this “place,” this mākôn of God’s sanctuary, that was to be cast down by the little horn, something that Antiochus never did. Though he did desecrate temple, as far as is known, he did not damage its architecture in any significant way.

4) Time factors for the little horn:

a. Time of origin. The little horn—dated in terms of the four kingdoms that came from Alexander’s empire—was to come up “at the latter end of their rule” (8:23). The only

problem is that the Seleucid dynasty consisted of a line of more than 20 kings who ruled from 311 to 65 B.C., and Antiochus IV was the eighth in line of those kings (he ruled from 175 to 164/3 B.C.). Because more than a dozen Seleucids ruled after him, and fewer than a dozen ruled before him, he hardly arose “at the latter end of their rule.” The Seleucids ruled for a century and a third before Antiochus IV and a century after him, which places him within two decades of the midpoint of the dynasty and not “at the latter end of their rule.”

b. Duration. The chronological time frame (“unto 2300 evening-mornings”) in Daniel 8:14 has been interpreted as the time that Antiochus IV had desecrated the temple or persecuted the Jews. The precise dates for this are well established, and they covered a period of exactly three years and ten days. Neither 2300 literal days (six years, four and two-thirds months) nor 1150 literal days (made by pairing evening and morning sacrifices to make full days) fits this historical period, since even the shorter of the two is two months too long.

c. The End. When Gabriel came to Daniel to explain the vision of chapter 8, he introduced his explanation with the statement, “Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end” (8:17). At the beginning of his actual explanation Gabriel again emphasized this point by stating, “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” (8:19). The phrases, “the time of the end” and “the appointed time of the end,” are also essential for a correct identity of the little horn.

Because the third and final section of the vision is concerned mainly with the little horn and its activities, it seems reasonable to conclude that the horn relates most directly to the “time of the end.” The end of the little horn, therefore, should coincide in one way or another with “the time of the end.”

At a bare chronological minimum Daniel’s time prophecies (Dan 9:24-27) had to extend to the time of the Messiah, Jesus, in the first century AD. “The time of the end” could arrive only some time after the fulfillment of that prophecy concerning Jesus (after all, how could there be “the time of the end” before Christ came?). Therefore, there is no way that Antiochus, who died in 164/3 B.C., fits with “the time of the end.”

5) Nature of the end of the little horn. According to the prophecy, the little horn was to come to its end in a particular way. “But, by no human hand, he shall be broken” (8:25), similar to the language that brought an end to the statue in Daniel 2 (Daniel 2:34), indicating supernatural intervention. Given the nature of the statement in 8:25, how could Antiochus IV fulfill this particular specification? As far as is known, he died of natural causes—not from extraordinary circumstances—during the course of his eastern campaign in 164/3 B.C.

6) Origin of the little horn

Much ado is made regarding the origin of the little horn. The texts in question are as follows: “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. And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land” (Daniel 8: 8, 9). The question arises, when it says that “out of one of them” came forth a little horn, what did the “them” refer to—one of the “four notable ones,” the four generals who divided Alexander’s empire (out

of which Antiochus came), or was it from one of “the four winds of heaven,” that is, simply, one of the compass points of the map? The evidence points strongly in favor of the latter, that is, the little horn came out of the “four winds of heaven,” which is the immediate antecedent of the phrase, “and out of one of them.” The original Hebrews reads, “and from the one, from them,” the “them” being the plural nouns closest to the phrase itself, which are “the four winds of heaven” (in Hebrew “heaven” is a plural noun). Much grammatical, syntactical, and contextual evidence points to “the winds of heaven,” not the four “notable ones,” as the origin point of the little horn power.

SUMMARY

The parallels between Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 make it abundantly clear that the little horn depicted in both visions refer to the same entity, and because the little horn in Daniel 7 cannot be Antiochus Epiphanes, the little horn in Daniel 8 can't be either. Besides this parallel, internal evidence of Daniel 8 regarding the nature, activity, origin, time-frame, and demise of the little horn prove that the Antiochus interpretation simply doesn't work. Of the three main prophetic schools of interpretation, it's clear that only the historicist is true to the basic meanings of the texts.