

Many prophecies of Chapter 8 look forward to the 400 “silent” years between the closing of the Old Testament with Malachi and the advent of the Lord in Matthew. We can divide this period into four sections:

The Persian Era: 450 – 330 BC

Symbolized by the bear of chapter 7 and the ram of chapter 8, it was this regime that allowed the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Their land was a minor province in the Medo-Persian empire and was generally left undisturbed during this time.

The practice of synagogue attendance first developed during the Babylonian captivity as a way to supplement temple worship with study of scriptures. Near the end of this time a temple rivaling Jerusalem was built on Mount Gerazim in Samaria, sparking tensions that endured until the Lord’s day (John 4:20).

The Hellenistic Era: 334 – 168 BC

Alexander the Great, the goat of chapter 8, quickly overran the Middle East and Central Asia as far as India. He is regarded as one of the greatest generals in history. Overall, the Jews prospered under Greek rule and established colonies in other cities around the Mediterranean world. We see the descendants of those colonies many times in the book of Acts. The Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek as the Septuagint around 250 BC.

Alexander, whose tutor was Aristotle, introduced Greek or Western culture into the lands he conquered. The Jews reacted in two different ways: A wealthier party centered around the high priest adopted Greek ways and became known as the Sadducees. Those who rejected the Hellenizing influence were known as Hasidim, or “pious ones,” later called Pharisees.

After Alexander’s premature death his empire was divided among four generals, the horns of 8:22. The descendants of two of them, Seleucus of Syria and Ptolemy of Egypt,

contended over possession of the holy land. That history accounts for much of Daniel 10.

In 168 BC Antiochus IV Epiphanes assumed the throne in Syria and conquered Jerusalem. He violently suppressed Jewish worship and set up a statue of Zeus in the Holy of Holies. We see him as the little horn of 8:9.

The Hasmonean (Maccabean) Era: 167 – 63 BC

In 167 BC a leader named Matathias led the anguished Jews in a successful revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes. After liberating Jerusalem they cleansed and purified the temple, an event now celebrated in the feast of Hannukah. Matathias’s sons and descendants were known as the Maccabees (“hammer”) and presided over a century of Jewish independence. The apocryphal book of Maccabees chronicles their victory.

The Roman Era: 63 BC – AD 636

The Roman general Pompey took advantage of internal Jewish quarrels to seize Jerusalem in 63 BC. The Romans later ruled through the house of Herod, a family of Jewish converts who had increased their legitimacy by marrying into the Maccabean family.

The end of the Roman era might be said to occur in AD 70 with the destruction of the city, or in AD 636 when Muslims took the rebuilt city from the Byzantine empire, the eastern remnant of the Roman empire.

It is important to remember that all this history took place centuries *after* it was given to Daniel in detailed and accurate visions.

Notes on Daniel 8

8:2 Susa was a prominent city in the ancient Persian empire. The modern Iranian city of Shush is on its site. There are three rivers near the city but it is uncertain which is the Ulai Canal.

8:3, 20 The ram represents the Medo-Persian empire. The first horn is Media, the original nation that was later overshadowed by Persia, the second and larger horn.

8:4 The primary areas conquered by Persia were to the north, south, and west. Their wars against Greece included famous battles at Marathon and Thermopylae.

8:5-7, 21 The male goat is Alexander the Great. The ancient enmity between Greece and Persia was a spur to Alexander's quick victories against the Persian empire.

8:8, 22 Alexander died at age 33 at the height of his strength. He had no direct heirs. In time his empire passed to four of his generals: Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus.

8:9 The little horn here is the historical figure Antiochus Epiphanes, not the same as the future Roman ruler of 7:8. In many ways, however, Antiochus seems a type and precursor to an eastern ruler who will arise in the end times similar to the beast of Revelation. Many commentators identify this person as an Assyrian enemy of Israel foretold in Micah 5. It is possible this glimpse of an eastern foe of the Jews marks the appearance of Islam in prophecy.

8:10-14 These verses tell in prophetic language of the attack against the Jews, their leaders, and their God by Antiochus. The restoration of the temple at the end is in verse 14. Note in verse 12 that truth itself is a casualty of this oppressive tyrant.

8:16 Gabriel is one of two unfallen angels named in scripture (Michael is the other). He appears

later to Mary the mother of Jesus in the gospel of Luke.

8:17 "The time of the end" refers to both the end of the Greek domination and the day of the Lord.

8:23-25 The identity of this "king of bold face" is uncertain. He battles "the Prince of princes," a title of the Lord, so does not appear to be Antiochus Epiphanes. He may be the future eastern tyrant of the end times who is typified by Antiochus. Again in verse 25 we see that deceit prospers under the government of the enemies of God. *"The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"* (2 Thess. 2:9-12).

8:26 "Evenings and mornings" refers to 2300 literal days, the actual duration of the temple desecration under Antiochus.