

The Eastern Little Horn

Daniel 8

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We have had before us most prominently the West, which among the earthly powers was the chief object for the prophet's contemplation as unveiled by the Spirit of God in the second and the seventh chapters of Daniel. This is the fourth and last Empire of man, and its revival under Satan's power, the occasion which will bring the Lord Jesus from heaven (2 Thess. 2: 8, Rev. 17, 19) to the judgment of the world, and to the setting up of what is called in the Revelation, "The world-kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11: 15). Thence we see the Christ has not yet received His world-kingdom. It is clear that the state of things proclaimed under the seventh trumpet has not arrived, but assuredly it will in due time. It is plainly to be at the end of the present age or dispensation, which is followed by a new "age to come" before the everlasting state.

Now you will find in all these visions of the Book of Daniel, whether made to Nebuchadnezzar or vouchsafed to the prophet, that they look forward to that epoch or what is called in a later chapter, "the time of the end." As the additional visions are given, further light is afforded or there would be no reason for giving them at all. They all, more or less, evidently end with divine judgment on the power to which they refer. Further it is clear that the vision of which we have been reading in Dan. 8 is of a comparatively limited nature. There is a preliminary review of the second and third empires; and you may wonder why a branch of the third should stretch away to the still future time when the Lord comes in judicial power and glory. But the reason of this will appear presently. You will do well to remember the truth already stated, that these successive world-powers or empires were superseded by one another; but there is no intimation that they lose their existence when they lose their supreme power. They retained a subordinate place after they were subdued; but they are shown to have a continued existence still. This indeed is distinctly stated in Dan. 7: 12: "As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away; yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time."

Here then we now hear of the Persian empire; where we would draw attention to the fact that Persia is no longer as in Dan. 7 shown as a bear. There the moral judgment of the Holy Spirit expressed itself symbolically about it and the other powers to Daniel. Nor is it either the arms and breast of silver, such as Nebuchadnezzar saw. The glory of Persia is somewhat diminished in comparison with the kingdom of Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar; but still it was a kingdom of great energy and conquest, especially at first. But why is it here changed from the bear of Daniel in the seventh chapter to be the ram as portrayed in Dan. 8: 2. It would appear to be for a very interesting reason. The second and third kingdoms were friendly to Israel in a way that neither Babylon nor Rome could pretend to be. Rome has hitherto and always been the enemy of the Jews. It was Rome that also razed the city and the sanctuary of Jerusalem to its foundations. None save the Edomites have been such unrelenting persecutors of the Jews as the Romans. And so the Rabbins identify Edom of old with Rome in modern times as the unsparing enemy of God's earthly people repudiated for a while for their sins.

No doubt the guilt of Israel was inexcusable and shameless, but God has not for ever cast off His people whom He foreknew; He may be indignant, but always has pity for them; and He is looking onward to the day when He will gather Israel out of the lands from the east and from the west, from the

north and from the south. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Whatever God gives, He stands to it; and sooner or later, when the day comes for His grace to work according to His promise, His call will indeed be effectual. The Jews are enemies now as regards the gospel, and grace brings Gentiles meanwhile to God. But as regards election, they are beloved on account of the fathers. For as the Gentiles once were disobedient to God but now become objects of mercy through Jewish unbelief, even so these were disobedient to your mercy, that they also may become objects of mercy. For God shut up all unto disobedience that He might have mercy on them all. And so, when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, all Israel shall be saved {Rom. 11: 26}. There ought to be no doubt that their call was from God and in the end sure. Every Christian knows it for himself and for the church; but he ought in no way to question it for the Jew. Rom. 11: 29 is said by the apostle himself expressly about Israel, though the principle is no less true of ourselves, who should never forget His people, and God's mercy yet in store for them.

Now there was exceptional kindness on the part of Medo-Persia; and this is seen from the first in the conduct of Darius, who was the first actor of that empire recorded in this book (Dan. 6). If Babylon was the power which became the enslaver and jailor of the Jew, Cyrus was the characteristic restorer of the Jews to their own land; and this in the very first year of his reign. It is clear that the prophecies of God had a powerful influence on him. It is true he did not know God; but God knew him, and this struck him immensely. He was not disobedient to the vision, as some men nominally Christian are today. Isaiah wrote not his chs. 44, 45 in vain even for him. Daniel too was famed among Jews and Gentiles before that day; as the prophets were acquainted one with another, and cherished the highest reverence for such as had gone before. It is only a conceited age that raises up its petty head, and shakes it at the word of God. But what opens the door of true intelligence in the scriptures is on the contrary faith, and as a consequence love for everything of God.

Christ personally is the living bread that came down out of heaven that the eater might live for ever; and such is His written word, the sustenance of that life: not bread, but God's word; and in such a way as cannot be destroyed, though in detail it may by man be injured as other things. How perverted has Christian baptism been! and the Lord's supper, in what divergent ways, how deeply! And what shall we say of priesthood, ministry, the church itself, from early centuries? So the word of God may be perverted through either ignorance or craft; not only if truly rendered, it stands, but nothing can be conceived so admirable. Even the scholars of the world cannot rest without being occupied with it. Who in Christendom but literateurs care about the Vedas, or the Avesta? the Yik-king, the Shooking, or the She-king? or about the Koran if we come later? Yes, the remarkable fact confronts us of mere rationalists, who believe in nothing of the Christian truth, spending their lives on the Bible, Old Testament and New. A few scholars may look into the heathen books to see what were the beliefs of ancient races; but think of the many baptised sceptics who give themselves up to the life-long study of the Bible! No doubt they do not lack boldness in treating of the holiest themes; nor are they indisposed to show by their peremptory decisions what wonderful critics they are, as well as the strange shortcomings of others who differ or are opposed to them. What a contrast with the inspired, both in communicating their messages and in estimating the prophets of old!

However, be this as it may, Dan. 7 sets before us a bear and a leopard as the symbols of the Persian and the Macedonian empires, which Dan. 8 represents under a ram and a he-goat. The reason for this change we take to be the close bearing of the latter chapter on Israel, and the kindness shown by those empires in their early days. Cyrus and Darius Hystaspes stand out prominently as their benefactors; and Alexander the Great paid them marked honour, as is known, whether or not we receive the account Josephus gives of the High Priest meeting Alexander and the reverence paid him by

the conqueror.

Although viewed before God the Medo-Persian and the Macedonian were but "beasts," and no better than the Babylonian before and the Roman after, still God did not fail to appreciate kindness done to His chastened people. Hence the change of the symbols in Dan. 8 compared with 7. In this special aspect they are presented as clean animals. First, Medo-Persia is now viewed as a ram, and, secondly, Greece as a he-goat. Whatever might be their consideration of the afflicted Jew, there was no mercy, nor lack of ambitious will one toward another. We have the ram as remarkably described now as the bear had been in the preceding vision. It was necessary to intimate a composite power. In Dan. 7 the bear raised itself on one side. In Dan. 8 the ram had two horns, both high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. Nothing like this was the case with the eagle-winged lion of Babylon. Notably distinct was the Greek he-goat, first with one conspicuous horn between his eyes, and later, when it was broken, four of mark (answering to the four heads of the leopard) toward the four winds of the heavens. Still more different was the Roman beast, with its ten horns, and a little one that subsequently overthrew three of the first horns.

Plainly then we herein see the peculiarity of Medo-Persia thus described as a twofold imperial power, and so contrasted with the one before, and the rest that succeeded. This quality belonged to it only. Nor this only: for, as we have read, it is stated carefully that one of the high horns came up after the other, and that the later one became the higher. This was the Persian element, which, though later, surpassed the previous Medish state. There was nothing similar in any other of these world-powers.

Care is taken that one cannot among the nations and kingdoms of the earth find anything really analogous but the Medo-Persian kingdom, thus assailed and superseded by Alexander the Great. He of course is the he-goat's notable horn. All is contrast. No other horn comes up to dispute with that conspicuous horn. Yet was it broken, as neither Nebuchadnezzar was, nor Cyrus. Alexander did indeed come from the west as one that touched not the ground, and in the fury of his power ran upon the hitherto mighty Persian power that pushed westward, and northward, and southward. Yet in the strangest and saddest way Alexander's course was cut short as a young man of thirty-two, in the midst of far-reaching plans beyond all his predecessors. And his generals began, as they often do, to fight one with another, if one could not inherit all, which should have the largest possible share of the broken Macedonian or Greek empire. After a few years' conflict emerged four kingdoms, four notable horns. Give if you can, out of any history, anything that so clearly answers to the vision. The facts are notorious and exactly correspond with the prophecy, and as contrasted as can be conceived with other conquerors in the East.

But two of these four horns are specified, and in a continuous manner beyond example in Dan. 11, whereas in this ch. 8 one only is selected. Why? Because of its bearing upon Israel and their worship in contempt of their God, Who at the set time ("the end of the indignation") will surely judge it. It is not at all here a question of Christianity but of the ancient people, already captive and scattered, a revelation for whose instruction and consolation was given to the prophet. There was then no such thing as the church as we know it now. Only one people had the law of God, yet broken and unhappy, because they had been guilty and even apostate people, priests, and kings. But still they had most of the Old Testament scriptures; and God looked on them with matchless patience. So He is still doing with fallen Christendom in spite of those men whom it ill becomes to fight against Him and His word. And while the Gentiles are being called by the gospel, God has not done with Israel, who are, spite of all, beloved for their fathers' sake. "The last end of the indignation" is an instructive statement in this very chapter, which shows how God, while cutting off the transgressors of Israel, will yet assuredly accomplish the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For God cleaves to His word and His oath,

though we may have to wait for the set time. Israel will yet awake to far greater love than that of the fathers, and on a deeper basis. They are beloved of Christ, and will be brought into living relationship with Jehovah under the new covenant.

It is clear that this time is not yet come. But all these visions bring us down to the border of that wondrous change, if they do not prepare the way for it. Accordingly, toward the end of Dan. 8 in the interpretation given to Daniel, we find not the date named in the vision, which appears to be already verified under Antiochus Epiphanes, the type of the coming foe, with details about this closing personage. The main interest centers in what is still future. There is no excuse for turning back on the past after so close an intimation from Him Who knows. Full information is given immediately after from verse 19, where we read "Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the latter time (or end) of the indignation." What was the beginning of the indignation? What does "the indignation" mean? It is first employed, similarly applied as far as one knows, in the prophet Isaiah, as you may verify for yourselves in Dan. 10 especially: God's holy displeasure at the persistent idolatry and corruptions of Israel. Therefore did He at length let the Gentiles not only master them but use their victory to expel them from the land. The "end of the indignation" will terminate in their restoration inwardly and outwardly, as all the prophets testify. It has nothing at all to do with the Christian or the church.

Christian interpreters rack their wits in vain to bring in their own relations with God and His Son; and as the Papist tries to fasten on Luther or Mahomet, so do Protestants on the Pope. But this controversial style is a wholly unintelligent way of reading prophecy. Besides, it panders to the selfish and schismatic leaven which alike produced, and is perpetuated in, the anomalous sections of the Christian profession. We surely ought to search and understand the scriptures, having the Holy Spirit to this end among others; and we are bound not to force or twist them, either for outdoing others or for our own comfort. In the gospel we have got good measure, well pressed down, and running over. Being thus blessed as we are in the Lord Jesus and by His perfect work, we ought to be under no temptation to take anything away from Israel. There they are through idolatry first, and rejecting the Christ last, in the worst plight possible, scattered and banished till the latter day, when they must pass through a tribulation unparalleled; and for what could it be but because of national apostasy? They will once more return to idols, little as they think it, and set up "the abomination of desolation" in the sanctuary. They refused the Christ; they will receive the anti-Christ as the retribution. God never chastises nor does He ever give His people up to their enemies, except they flagrantly depart from Himself. Then His aggrieved love proves that He is a jealous God, and has indignation against the enormities of His people. Judgment begins there.

What has all this to do with the Christian or with the church? It was through Israel's fall that salvation came to the Gentiles, but even thus ultimately to provoke Israel to jealousy, and to display at the end the saving unfailing mercy of God. You may tell me Christians are often unworthy in their ways; and so they indeed are. You may tell me the church has been quite as guilty as ever Israel was in the past; so much, that one, who knew what it was to be alternately a Protestant and a Papist and a freethinker, ventured to say, "The annals of Christendom are the annals of hell." He who so spoke never knew the Lord in any of his phases; yet his words do not misrepresent Christendom. He was a brilliant historian, but not having the Son of God, he therefore had not God. He could see evil, but knew neither grace nor truth. Thus and there it is, that man's judgment comes into such collision with everything divine, while believers are bound to judge the wickedness of a hollow Christian profession. "Everyone that is of the truth heareth My (Christ's) voice." The only true God is faithful and true, and having given us grace and truth in the Lord Jesus, He calls us to be decided and uncompromising before the world. Begotten by the word of truth, it becomes us to be ever careful about the truth; but

where we are not assured of it from God, it were well to wait in silence, yet earnest to learn and confiding in His love.

To resume then, this power that stood up (one of the four from out of the broken Greek empire) has its representative at the end of the indignation. "The ram which thou sawest having two horns; they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Greece (Javan); and the great horn that was between his eyes is the first king," Alexander of Macedonia, surnamed the Great.

Now that being broken, whereas four stood up in its stead, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power. And at the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors shall have come to the full, a king of bold countenance and understanding dark sentences (or riddles) shall stand up. Who are "the transgressors" in this or in other scriptures? The reprobate among the Jews; and why? Israel only had the law of God given direct to themselves, the violators of which are therefore termed "transgressors." How does scripture describe Gentiles? "Sinners of the Gentiles," not transgressors. We of the nations were led away to dumb idols, howsoever we might be led, as the apostle describes it; and by the gospel we were brought straight from idolatry to Christ. Gentiles did not pass through the kind of legal apprenticeship which the children of Israel knew. It is plain that the correct designation of our once heathen state is therefore "sinners of the Gentiles." Scripture is more accurate than theology or any human authority; and to unlearn current phraseology in divine things is an invaluable Biblical exercise.

The text intimates here that the Jews are at the end of the age to become worse than even now. So said Isaiah and the prophets generally; as our Lord also in the parable, as we may call it, of Matt. 12: 43-45. The unclean spirit, which had gone out of the man, but returns to his house, empty, swept, and garnished, takes with him to dwell there seven other spirits worse than himself, and thus the last condition of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be to this wicked generation also. "Empty, swept, and garnished" had been, was then, and is now the condition of the Jews. In striking contrast with their ways of old, there has been no idolatry among them for more than 2,000 years. God's discipline in sending them to Babylon suppressed their inveterate love of strange gods, which were no gods but demons. As a clever Hebrew apologist admitted in the Quarterly Review some few years ago, the Jews that forced Pilate to crucify our Lord, Pharisees, priests, and all, were just like the Jews of the present day. Granted; and therefore did our Lord characterize them as "this wicked generation"; but as He said elsewhere, "This Generation shall not pass away until all these things shall be fulfilled." It is still the same moral state, till all that the prophets predicted of "the end" be accomplished. This Christ-rejecting generation that crucified Him is going on still; there is the same self-will, the same enmity, against Him Who came to die sacrificially. There is no change for the better, no repentance to believe. The house is still "empty, swept, and garnished." The Holy Spirit does not dwell there. Consequently the Jews, though fairly moral and clear of idolatry, have no life Godward, and lie open to the final delusion. So the Lord declared there is a sad change coming at the end; and that change is parabolically described by the old unclean spirit accompanying the seven spirits worse than himself, when he returns for the close. How little the Jews believe they are going to establish idols again! Yet this is as certain from various scriptures as anything can be, notably Dan. 9: 27, and Dan. 11: 38, 39, which await their fulfillment. Thus the last state will be worse than the first. But only at that time will deliverance come, as well as destructive judgment for "the many."

So shall it be also to that wicked generation. Here the transgressors shall come to the full, and God allows the Gentile scourge in "a king of fierce countenance and understanding dark sentences," who shall stand up.

And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; and he shall . . . corrupt the mighty ones, and the people of the saints. Scripture describes Israel according to their privileges and moral responsibility, even when they are as far as possible from answering to them. And through his policy also shall he cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he will magnify [himself] in his heart; and by peace (or prosperity) will corrupt many; he will also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand (Dan. 8: 19-25). This evil agent is not the wilful king or Antichrist who is to reign in Palestine in that day. It is another king that from without opposes Antichrist, is no less wicked, and perishes as awfully. He is the same who in the last prophecy of Daniel (11: 40-45) is called "the king of the north." Many no doubt are aware that out of Alexander's broken empire arose the kingdom of Syria which fell to Seleucus Nicator. Of that line Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 11: 21-32) persecuted the Jews and insulted the God of Israel beyond all others, and sought to destroy the Jews and their religion. Who was raised up as a stay in that day? A great empire? Nothing of the kind; the Maccabees who knew their God and were strong and active. This movement among the Jews, mingled as it was, is described in Dan. 11: 32-35; but we need no more now, as it will come before us later.