

Sermon – 18/11/2007 pm

Vision of a Little Horn

Study Text: Daniel 8:1–27

In his second vision Daniel saw a ram and a goat engage in mortal combat. The goat, symbolising the kingdom of Greece won. Alexander the Great ruled the known world from 336BC to 323BC. Following his death the kingdom he ruled was broken upon into four parts. Of these four kingdoms one takes centre stage in Daniel's second vision.

Out of one of them came a little horn that grew exceedingly great towards the south, toward the east and toward the glorious land (8:9). This little horn did not necessarily take centre stage in secular history for secular history does not focus on the people of God. In the Bible history is viewed from God's perspective with a focus upon his people and his kingdom.

Some years ago in India a TV series on the Mahabharata, a Hindu epic was very successful. The producers then started to make a TV series on the Bible. They made a number of episodes on Nimrod the mighty hunter but then they got lost and the series collapsed. They were trying to make the Bible into the history of man, a story about man's exploits and triumphs. The Bible is very disappointing to secular historians because it does not exalt man but God. The story of the Bible follows the people of God and the kingdom of God.

When God called Abraham and made a covenant with him he promised that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. From Abraham God raised up a people unto himself, a people not mighty in the eyes of the world but rather *the least of all peoples* (Deuteronomy 7:7). God made a covenant with his people and declared they would be a light to all the nations. They would reflect the glory of God in this fallen world.

The covenant people of God still exist today. They are the church. The true church does not feature greatly in the media or in secular history. I say 'true' church because people know the history of the crusades and the inquisition as if these represent the history of the true church of God. The other day a reporter asked a Buddhist monk if his doctrines allowed him to react with violence in the way the Muslims have in 'jihad' and Christians in the crusades. The reporter ignored the teaching of Jesus and the history of the true church.

Antiochus the Antichrist

Claimed Divinity

The little horn moved towards *the glorious/beautiful land (8:9)* and exalted *himself as high as the prince of the host (8:11)*. This simply means that he led his army to attack Jerusalem, the holy place of the Jews, and exalted himself against God. In the interpretation given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel he is told that a king shall arise (8:23) rising up against the Prince of princes and attacking the holy people.

The king represented by this little horn is not the same as the one represented by the little horn in Daniel's vision of the four beasts. The little horn there arose from the fourth kingdom which probably symbolised Rome. The little horn in this vision arises from one section of the

Greek kingdom. Although not the same king, there are many similarities in their character. Both represent the antichrist; men who proudly put themselves in the place of Christ.

Who then is the king symbolised by this little horn? This king is somewhat easier to identify than the previous little horn because in the interpretation here the kingdom of Greece is named. Babylon became the centre of the Seleucid section of this empire. In 175BC Antiochus Epiphanies IV usurped the throne of his nephew to become king. Antiochus was his original name and 'Epiphany' means manifest or appear. He later added the title 'theos' or god to his name.

In the apocryphal book of Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanies IV is spoken of as 'the man who only a short time before seemed to touch the stars in the sky' (II Maccabees 9:10). Daniel says he saw this little horn cast down 'some of the host and some of the stars'. This probably refers to believing Jews, the people of God. Such action goes along with exalting himself against the God. The saints are often seen as already dwelling in heaven. 'God numbers us amongst the stars' write Calvin. Let us remember that we are citizens of heaven, and live as such in this fallen world (Philippians 3:20).

Daily Sacrifices Stopped

In 168BC, after attacking Egypt and being turned back, Antiochus Epiphanies IV vented his rage on the Jews, brutally attacking them in Jerusalem. One Sabbath he entered Jerusalem with 20,000 troops. He desecrated the temple by offering a pig on the altar. He would not allow the Jews to sacrifice a lamb every morning and evening in the temple as was their practice.

Desecrated the Temple

The place of his sanctuary was cast down (8:11). Antiochus Epiphanies IV further desecrated the temple by installing an idol of Zeus in the temple. This became known as the 'abomination of desolation', referred to in a later chapter (11:31) and also by Jesus (Matthew 24:15). Jesus used this term to refer to a later destruction of the temple – in AD70 by the Romans. In fact the picture of Antiochus Epiphanies IV serves as a type for later antichrists that appear in apocalyptic visions given to John in the book of Revelation.

Why and When

This persecution under Antiochus Epiphanies IV is said to be *because of transgression* (8:12). The Hebrew is not so clear but we take it that this refers to Jews who had departed from the truth. In the interpretation we read *in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness* (8:23). 'The transgressors are not the heathen, but apostate Jews who introduced heathen rites among the Jews and built in Jerusalem a heathen gymnasium for their games' (Young). We know the terrible status of teaching and worship in the temple just two hundred years after this time of Antiochus. Jesus himself had to cleanse the temple.

Satan can use evil men like Antiochus Epiphanies IV to bring down the house of God in an instant, but he often uses more subtle means. The church in our land is not being brutally attacked as it has been down through the ages and still is in many places today. But we see the hand of Satan in the false teaching that continues in various churches. Did you hear the preacher who denied the virgin birth, the resurrection, the miracles, and even discounted the Cross of Jesus Christ. He was more concerned to 'inclusive' and welcomes homosexuals into

the pulpit. We must be alert to attacks not only from without – and they may well come soon – but also from within.

Daniel overheard two ‘holy ones’ or angels speaking about this desolation of the temple (8; 13). He heard that it would be for 2300 days, or literally 2300 ‘evenings and mornings’. After this the temple would be cleansed (8:14). Now we know to be careful with numbers in apocalyptic literature. This number indicates a divinely determined and definite period of suffering. Nevertheless, many say that this 2300 refers to the morning and evening sacrifice and so to 1150 days. This period of just over three years some link with the three and half years of Daniel chapter seven, while others say that it corresponds to the time the temple in Jerusalem was used for heathen sacrifices. Antiochus Epiphanies IV set up the idol of Zeus in 168BC and in 165BC Judas Maccabaeus led a Jewish revolt defeating the heathens and cleansing the temple.

Daniel was told that this king who exalts himself, this king who ruled by deceit and cunning, this king who prospered for but a short time, would be broken without hands, meaning without human hands. God himself would take care of this antichrist figure.

Antiochus Epiphanies IV died in 164BC from a mysterious illness which the Jews attributed to the hand of God (I Maccabees 6). He did not die at the hands of man but at the hands of God. We are reminded of a later king, King Herod, who was similarly struck down by God for glorifying himself and not God (Acts 12). How many other rulers, and not only rulers but ordinary men who exalt themselves against God have been struck down by God.

God may allow the wicked to prosper for a time according to his divine purposes. But be sure that those who are full of human pride and live their life ignoring God and taking the glory that is due to him upon themselves, will come under his judgment. *God resists the proud but give grace to the humble* (James 4:6). Remember friendship with the world means enmity towards God.

On the other hand as humble child of God, as one who walks by faith and not in your own strength, you can be comforted in the knowledge that God will in his time destroy those who oppose and persecute his chosen people. Daniel was told to seal up this vision, not that no one see it but that it not be lost. How precious are the words of God to those who love him and walk in his ways!

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon