

Kings of the North and South: Taking Another Look at Daniel's Prophecy

What can we learn from Daniel's vision of the ram and male goat that symbolized the ancient empires of Persia and Greece? Can this prophecy help us understand the geopolitical relevancy of the prophecy concerning the kings of the north and south as recorded by Daniel?

The Apostle Paul argued that the gentiles were—until the time of Christ—outside the Commonwealth of Israel respective to salvation and the national promises afforded to the descendants of Abraham. But at the time of Paul's ministry the tribes of the commonwealth—once a unified regional empire under one government in the region of Palestine—were expectedly functioning as a dispersed, yet identifiable, peoples in their diaspora throughout parts of Central Asia, Asia Minor and the fringes of Eastern Europe.

Paul also said that because of the commonwealth's dispersion, and their rejection of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai, the peoples of Israel had solidified for themselves a form of spiritual "blindness," which allowed Paul to reason from the commonwealth's situation that God would make the holy spirit available to the gentile peoples, but not to the exclusion of all the

peoples of Israel. This led Paul to further conclude that the commonwealth—by in large—would function in ignorance of their earliest national identity “until the fullness of the nations [gentiles] comes in; and so all Israel will be saved, even as it has been written, ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob’” (Rom. 11:25, LITV).

Making for an important geopolitical issue regarding the Commonwealth of Israel that was certainly a part of the teachings of Jesus.

Because Jesus also used the same context as Paul when he spoke of the “days of vengeance,” which would refer to the vengeance granted to Jesus by God, and Jesus continued by saying that there would be “great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people,” and that “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:22-24). (See also, Heb. 10:30-31.) (Author's emphasis throughout.)

Notably, Jesus was speaking about a time of political and economic distress that some nations would bring upon the city of Jerusalem, which would affect not only the current nation-state of Israel, but also the currently existing and dispersed peoples of

the commonwealth of Israel. Foretelling, then, of a time when a final military and political incursion would attempt to further magnify the governance and political will of those nations that are destined to eventually create a greater conflict centered in this region of the Middle East.

What then could this mean for the city of Jerusalem?

From an historical perspective, it is obvious that the city of Jerusalem has been subject to many military and political incursions, at least since the time of Tigleth-pileser III of Assyria. Which allows us to say that Jerusalem has long been subject to some form of geopolitical domination beginning with the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which continued through the Babylonian period, the Medo-Persian rule, and the Greco-Macedonian influence, until the collapse of the commonwealth came at the hands of the Classical Roman Empire.

Map showing the United Nations Partition Plan for the region of Palestine as it related to the former British Mandate of 1922. The plan envisaged the division of Palestine into 3 parts: a Jewish state, an Arab State, and the City of Jerusalem, to be placed under an International Trusteeship system (1947). (Map courtesy of U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Public Domain.)

Also, we do well to consider the period of the Byzantine Empire and the later Ottoman Empire that continued to play a part in the political affairs of Jerusalem until the end of World War I. (We cannot forget that Jerusalem became subject to the will of the great powers after World War II, as understood from the United Nations mandate regarding Palestine.)

Leading us to consider that when Jesus spoke of the “times of the gentiles,” it was notably understood by the disciples of Jesus, which brings us to think about how it was that Paul and the other apostles knew about this period of distress that would precede the return of Christ. Noting also that Jesus used this geopolitical context to warn the disciples—and the church that would develop from their teachings—that an “abomination of desolation” would come upon the city of Jerusalem, the State of Israel and the region of Palestine, leading to an unprecedented conflict with the coming kingdom of God. (Political actions such as this would undoubtedly reflect an indignant view of the covenant made with the patriarch Abraham.)

For Jesus said: “when ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place,” then know with certainty that a “great tribulation,” will soon begin, and “except those days [“days of vengeance”] should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but

for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Mt. 24:15, 22).

Making then the "times of the gentiles" and the war that brings "desolations"—noted in the seventy-weeks prophecy—to be mutually inclusive geopolitical events that will be significantly different from any other time in the history of the region of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem—and also the world.

Bringing us to further consider the vision that was given to Daniel regarding the kings of the north and south, because Daniel had written that a "king of the north" would come to power, and with his coming to power an "abomination of desolation" is established, and this individual involves himself in the religious and political affairs of Israel. This would then trigger a related series of long-term events leading to a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time" (Dan. 12:1). (Daniel also places this "time of trouble" at the return of Jesus (Dan. 11:31, 35).)

What, then, would bring the world into such a politically and economically chaotic state where the city of Jerusalem would become subject to the political will of competing coalitions that will lead to years of distress for the Middle East and eventually a world conflict at the return of Christ?

We can begin to address this question by reviewing the vision that was given to Daniel in the third year of King Belshazzar's reign over Babylon, not long before the citadel city of the Babylonian empire fell to the Medo-Persian conquest of Mesopotamia.

Now, in Daniel's vision we have a scenario that depicts a ram with two horns and a male goat that has one horn, and the latter rushes at the two-horned ram to destroy it, and afterwards we see that the notable horn of the male goat is broken and separated. Then we see that in the notable horn's stead we have the rise of four additional horns, and as explained to Daniel, the ram and the male goat represent the Medo-Persian and Greco-Macedonian Empires respectively, and history would bear out that the Greek Empire did eventually overthrow the Persian Empire and the Achaemenid dynasty founded by Cyrus the Great (Dan. 8:3-8).

What followed was a period of internal conflicts among the many satrapies (provinces) and the Diadochi (Successors) that began within a relatively few years after the death of Alexander the Great. These conflicts among all the successors and rival satrapies forever divided the once great Greco-Macedonian Empire to the "four winds," particularly so after the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE.

However, regarding the history of the Successors of the Greco-Macedonian Empire we find that most biblical expositors and commentators generally accept that the four horns represent the politically significant divisions of Alexander's empire, which is—in reality—an over-simplification of the geopolitical events that transpired after the death of Alexander the Great.

Meaning that even though most commentators seldom disagree among themselves regarding the interpretation of Daniel's prophecies, we cannot help but realize that many commentators do take some liberties in how they relate historical and secular events to the geopolitical events described by Daniel. Giving us then good reason to take another look at the related prophecy regarding the kings of the north and south and how this prophecy relates to the successor kingdoms of Alexander's empire and also how it may relate to the "times of the gentiles" spoken of by Jesus and also the Apostle Paul.

Now, for the most part, commentators place Daniel's prophecy of the kings of the north and south into an historical context, generally beginning with those rulers that followed the deaths of the original Successors of Alexander's empire. This would mean that there was indeed a selective process involved in biblical interpretation, and the result has been that commentators have reasonably

associated the "little horn" of Daniel's prophecy with the prophetic "king of the north," but they have unreasonably associated this individual with the Seleucid dynasty simply because this kingdom was historically and geographically located north of Jerusalem (Dan. 8:9).

To be more specific, when they associated the "little horn" with the "king of the north," who embodies the "abomination of desolation," they assumed by interpreting from an historical and literary method that this "vile person" was none other than Antiochus called Epiphanes. Even though it is by no means reasonable to associate the nature and deeds of the "little horn" and the "king of the north" with any rulers of the Seleucid dynasty and in particular the notorious tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:10-11; 11:36).

For Daniel wrote that this ruler is described as coming to power at a time when "the transgressors are come to the full," and he is described as "a king of fierce countenance," and one who understands "dark sentences," and his "power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people" (Dan. 8:23-24).

This, of course, was not Antiochus Epiphanes.

Therefore, we are obliged to reexamine the prophecies of Daniel and consider the context for how this individual could rise to such political prominence in the future in a way that affects the geopolitical status of the Middle East. Especially in a world that is strongly influenced by the leading democratic nations and institutions of the world, such as the democratic member states of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

So with this in mind we need to review some history regarding the empire founded by Alexander the Great.

Now, when the armies of Alexander began to conquer the old world of the Persian Empire we see that families of the soldiers, relatives, doctors, cooks, builders and so on, all traveled with the army of Alexander. In this way, a foundation was laid for the Hellenistic Age, making way for the spread of Greek culture and political influence that would eventually become established from Macedonia to Egypt and eastward to the Indus River. (Alexander freed Greek settlements from Persian domination, which allowed for some satrapies to remain relatively independent, such as the former northern Pontic Kingdom of Mithridates VI.)

This, then, is the general geopolitical condition in which the early Successors struggled and warred to become the sole ruler

over the empire of Alexander, and it is this situation that sets the backdrop for the rise to power of a yet future ruler who will set his will to enforce a governance over the city of Jerusalem. Making it reasonable to say that the prophecy of the ram and male goat gives us some insight into the nature of this individual and future ruler, but it also gives us the geographic context into which this individual will come to power in the future.

The concept of a greater and cohesive Eurasian geopolitical sphere is fast becoming a reality in world affairs. How such a political block will affect the Middle East remains to be demonstrated, but from a biblical perspective the consequences of interference in Israel's position in the Middle East would provoke a worldwide conflict. (Map courtesy of Central Intelligence Agency, Public Domain.)

That is somewhere in the geopolitical sphere of Eurasia.

However, if we are to understand the larger geopolitical events that will bring this individual to power, we are obliged to consider the context given to us in the prophecy of the kings of the north and south, noting that the common marker for this prophecy was given to us by Jesus and expounded upon by the Apostles Paul and John. For Jesus had told his disciples that an "abomination" would bring a coalition into

the Middle East, and the result would be that Jerusalem will become subject to significant destruction before the return of Christ.

Noting, also, that the timeframe for these events was given to us by the prophet Daniel who wrote that a king of the north will conspire with others to “remove the regular sacrifice,” and its service and authority is replaced by the “abomination that desolates,” which gives us reason to surmise that religion, as well as political authority, is profoundly altered by a king of the north who seeks to become the directing authority in such matters in the region of Palestine (Dan. 11:31, 36).

Then, Daniel tells us that from the time when the “regular sacrifice” has stopped, we have a period of 1,290 days that will elapse, and during this time we see that a king of the south asserts himself against the king of the north, and in retaliation the king of the north overthrows the king of the south and proceeds to overrun the Middle East and much of northern Africa.

This would allow us then to reasonably say that the “times of the gentiles” spoken of by Jesus would generally encompass the events of Daniel’s prophecy regarding the kings of the north and south, which allows us to consider that the “times of the gentiles” is expectedly a larger span of time than the 42 months in which the city of Jerusalem is

“trodden down” by those nations that come to impose their political will on Jerusalem (Rev. 11:2).

Placing the prophecy of the kings of the north and south into the future.

Considering also that unless there are many changes in the democratic institutions that currently police the world today, it is nearly inconceivable to believe that such a leading individual as a king of the north could come to power and influence at this time. Which means that we must consider that much of Daniel’s prophecy regarding the kings of the north and south is yet future, and at a time when democratic governments would have expectedly retreated from their geopolitical influence.

Therefore, we may conclude with some confidence that when Jesus referred to the “times of the gentiles” he was referring to a long-term series of events yet future, and even though marginal typologies may exist historically regarding the kings of the north and south, it does not mean that an historical typology equals biblical fulfillment or partial fulfillment respective to any of the prophecies of Daniel.

Allowing us to further conclude that when Jesus spoke of the “times of the gentiles,” and the “abomination of desolation,” the disciples well understood what Jesus was saying

because they had an historical reference for these things in the writings of Daniel.

