

The Goat Broken Without Human Agency

Daniel 8: 9-14; 21-27

Review:

From the rise of human civilization to the time of Christ, the world had only five world empires.

The Assyrian Empire (911 to 609 BC); **the Babylonian Empire** (609 to 539 BC); **the Persian Empire** (539 to 333 BC); **the Greek Empire** (333 to 146 BC); and the **Roman Empire** (146 BC to AD 476).

Last week in the first part of our study of **Daniel 8 (verses 1-8; 15-21)**, we examined the rise and fall of the **Persian Empire** (the Ram with two horns – the Medes and the Persians), and the rise and **Grecian Empire** (Alexander the Great – the horn between the eyes of the Goat) and his death (323 BC). After the death of Alexander the Great, *the Grecian empire divided among his four generals*. They fought for supremacy and eventually divided the Middle East among themselves. Ptolemy secured control of Egypt (south), Seleucus took Syria, Israel, and Asia Minor (north), and two other generals took east and west.

TODAY'S THEME: When a political leader comes after God's people, the LORD will bring him down, and the celebration of Hanukkah is a testament to the LORD'S faithfulness for His people nationally.

The land of Israel (Judea) was sandwiched between Ptolemy's region and Seleucus' region. For the next 125 years the Seleucids and the Ptolemies battled over the land bridge of Judea. The Seleucids finally won in 198 BC when Antiochus III defeated the Egyptians and incorporated Judea into his empire. Initially, he continued to allow the Jews autonomy. But after a series of stinging defeats at the hands of the Romans (192-188 BC), *Antiochus III began a program of Hellenization that threatened to force the Jews to abandon their monotheism for the Greeks' paganism*. Antiochus eventually backed down in the face of Jewish opposition to introducing idols in their temples, **but then his son came to the throne**.

That son, called **Antiochus IV "The Great" Epiphanes** (Seleucid King from 176 to 164 BC). **He is the "small horn" mentioned in Daniel 8:9**. His original name was Mithradates, but he assumed the name Antiochus after he ascended the throne. Antiochus IV insisted the people call him "Antiochus Epiphanes" (**God manifested**), but the people in Judea called him Antiochus Epimanes ("The Mad One"). The Jews, tiring of the Hellenization of Judea (including the blasphemy of the Greek leaders), were ripe for revolt under Antiochus Epiphanes. According to the authors of the *Books of the Maccabees*, while Antiochus was busy in Egypt, a rumor spread that he had been killed. Jason, the deposed Jewish High Priest, gathered a force of 1,000 soldiers and attacked the city of Jerusalem (read **II Maccabees 5:11-14**).

Jason's rebellion was defeated, and in 167 BC, Antiochus decided to consolidate his empire and to strengthen his hold over the region. He outlawed Jewish religious rites, including Sabbath observance and circumcision, and he ordered the worship of Zeus as the supreme god and erected an altar to Zeus in the Temple and sacrificed a pig (2 Maccabees 6:1-12). This act was anathema to the Jews. It led to a revolt led by a priest named Mattathias. There are appropriate times for government revolt.

Mattathias ben Johanan was a Jewish priest who founded the Maccabees in 167 BC. A Greek official tried to force a priest named Mattathias to make a sacrifice to a pagan god, the Jew murdered the man. Mattathias lived in the city of Modein, and the people rose up behind him to fight against Antiochus Epiphanes. I Maccabees 2:27 has Mattathias saying, "Let everyone who has a zeal for the Law and who stands by the covenant follow me!" The Maccabean Revolt began. Mattathias was called "The Hammer."

The family of Mattathias became known as **the Maccabees** for two possible reasons:

1. From the Hebrew word for "hammer" (*makabah*) used in I Kings 6:7. The family of Mattathias was said to strike hammer blows against their enemies; so they were called Maccabees.
2. From the Hebrew in **Exodus 15:11** which was the "battle cry" for the followers of Mattathias:
"Mi chamocha ba'elim YHWH," "Who is like You among the heavenly gods, LORD!"

Antiochus underestimated the will and strength of the Maccabees. He sent a small force to put down the rebellion. When that force was annihilated, he led a more powerful army into battle only to be defeated again. **In 164 BC, the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and purified the Temple** (Happy Hanukkah!).

Mattathias did not survive to see that first Hanukkah. Before he died in 166 BC, he gathered his five sons around him and urged them and the Jewish people to continue steadfast in defense of their ancestral religion. **Judah Maccabeus**, son of Mattathias, led the Jews to overtake the Temple in 164 BC. After capturing the city, the Maccabees still had to deal with a Hellenized priesthood that often differed with the conservative Maccabean leadership of Jerusalem. One of the significant acts of Judah Maccabeus was agreement made between Judah Maccabee and the Roman Republic in 161 BC, according to **1 Maccabees 8:17-20** and Josephus. **It is the first recorded contract between the Jewish people and the Romans.** For the next 20 years, the Maccabees sought to reform the Hebrew faith to reflect more ancestral traditions.

Daniel 8:9-14; 21-27, the Goat and the Small Horn Is the Vision of Antiochus Epiphanes and Hanukkah.

When the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple from Antiochus in December 164 BC, there was no pure oil accessible. Many of the Temple vessels were reclaimed including the Menorah. When the Maccabees finally found a small flask of oil, they made a make-shift menorah out of spears and lit the oil which should have lasted only one day. God made an incredible miracle and the oil lasted for eight days. The Jews remember the cleansing of the Temple mount and the restoration of Temple worship through Hanukkah.

Daniel 8 records the sinful activities of Antiochus Epiphanes. But it also records his end.

"He will be broken without human agency." (Daniel 8:25).

But wait a minute. There are many stories of the Maccabees fighting the Greek prince Antiochus. There are four books that record the work of the Maccabees against the Greeks: I, II, III, and IV Maccabees.

I Maccabees: The First Book of the Maccabees covers the period of forty years from the accession of Antiochus (175 BC) to the death of Simon the Maccabee (135 BC).

II Maccabees: Opens with two letters written by Jews living in Palestine. The letters are sent to Jews dwelling in Egypt, describing the Maccabean Revolt. The time covered by II Maccabees is barely fifteen years (175-160 BC). The author is a religious teacher, and the work is more rhetorical than historical.

III and IV Maccabees: These books are not accepted by Jews, any Christian denomination, or other religion as inspired. III Maccabees has nothing to do with the Maccabees but discusses Jewish persecution from 222-205 BC. IV Maccabees is a semi philosophical discourse or sermon on the "supremacy of pious reason."

Is that not human agency? Of course. But defeating oppression and tyranny is ultimately the LORD'S work. Though there was great effort and courageous human actions to resist the evil Greek empire, in the end, God removed leaders *"without human agency."* Ultimately, any kingdom that does not acknowledge the King of kings, the Prince of princes, the unshakeable Kingdom that has no end, will be crushed the LORD. *The message of Daniel 8 is that the kingdoms of this world rise and fall, but the LORD'S Kingdom is eternal.*