

Daniel 8:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.

Analysis

There stood before the river a ram which had two horns...but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last—This vision receives direct interpretation in verse 20: the two-horned ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The Hebrew *qarnayim* (קַרְנַיִם, 'two horns') symbolizes dual kingship, while the asymmetry reflects historical reality: Media initially dominated (the first horn), but Persia under Cyrus rose to preeminence (the higher horn that 'came up last').

The ram's position 'before the river' (likely the Ulai, v. 2) places the vision geographically in Persia's heartland. Rams symbolized Persian power; Persian kings wore ram-headed crowns. The Hebrew *gaboah* (גָּבוֹהַ, 'high/higher') emphasizes Persia's ascendancy over Media within the coalition. This detailed symbolism shows God revealing not just empire succession but internal power dynamics.

Historical Context

The Medo-Persian Empire (539-331 BC) began as a coalition but became Persian-dominated under Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Daniel received this vision in approximately 551 BC (Belshazzar's third year, v. 1), predating Persia's supremacy by 12 years. The Medes initially held power through

their role in destroying Assyria (612 BC), but Cyrus's conquests elevated Persia to dominance. This vision's accuracy demonstrates God's foreknowledge and sovereignty.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of animal symbolism (ram, goat, etc.) make complex political realities understandable?
2. What does Daniel's ability to see future empires teach about God's control over gentile kingdoms during Israel's exile?

Interlinear Text

וְאָשׁ אַ יַל וְהָיָה הַ וְאָרָא הַ עֵינַי וְהָאֵת
Then I lifted up mine eyes and saw ^{H2009} **ram** **a**
H5375 H5869 H7200 H352 H259

וְהִקְרַנְיָם וְלֹא הָיָה לְפָנַי עָמַד
and behold there stood before the river ^{H0} **and the two horns**
H5975 H6440 H180 H7161

הַשֵּׁנִי יֵת מִן וְהַגְּבוּהַ וְהָאֵת וְהַגְּבוּהַ וְהִקְרַנְיָם
and the two horns and the higher a and the higher ^{H4480} **than the other**
H7161 H1364 H259 H1364 H8145

בְּאַחֲרֹנָה: עָלָה וְהַגְּבוּהַ הַ
and the higher came up last
H1364 H5927 H314

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 8:20 (Parallel theme): The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.

Daniel 10:5 (Parallel theme): Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: