

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 (קָרְנַיִם, '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 gabaoah (גָּבוֹאָה, '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

וְאָמַת	אֵל	וְהַנּוּ	זָאָרָא	הָעִנִּי	וְאָשָׁ	א
Then I lifted up	mine eyes	and saw		H2009	ram	a
H5375	H5869	H7200			H352	H259
עַמְּ ד	לְפִנֵּ	לְפָנָ	וְאָבָ	לְ	וְאָבָ	וְאָבָ
and behold there stood	before	the river	H0		and the two horns	
H5975	H6440	H180			H7161	
וְקָרְבָּנִים	וְקָרְבָּה	וְקָרְבָּה	וְקָרְבָּה	וְקָרְבָּה	וְקָרְבָּה	מִן
and the two horns	and the higher		a	and the higher	H4480	than the other
H7161	H1364		H259	H1364		H8145
בְּאַחֲרָה:	עַל	הָעַל	גָּבָהּ	וְקָרְבָּה		
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: