

PROPHECY UNCUT

Identifying the Little Horn of Daniel 8

INTRODUCTION

Daniel 8 makes use of the symbolic imagery of a little horn to portray an entity that would rise to power from small beginnings, having both political and spiritual ambitions. Whoever this entity is, it seems that the tone of Daniel 8 is one of warning for the true follower of God.

So, who is the 'Little Horn' in Daniel 8 and what are its counterfeit spiritual teachings that all true seekers after God need to beware of? The answer to this question will be spread out over two studies. The scope of the present study will be limited to the question of identity.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE FIRST PART OF DANIEL 8'S VISION – PRIOR TO THE LITTLE HORN ARRIVING ON THE SCENE OF ACTION?

Daniel 8:3-9, 20-23

The vision of Daniel 8 begins with two animals. The first was a Ram with two horns, one horn higher than the other (Dan 8:3-4). The second was a male goat with a large horn, which was subsequently broken and then replaced with 4 smaller horns (Dan 8:5, 8). The Male Goat is depicted as rising up in violence against the two-horned Ram and utterly destroying it (Dan 8:6-7).

Later, in the interpretation of the vision, Daniel is told that the Ram represented the Medo-Persian empire (Dan 8:20) while the goat represented the Grecian empire, which would be led mightily as a unified force by its first king (Dan 8:21) – historically identified as Alexander the Great.

Unfortunately, Alexander the Great died unexpectedly in 323 B.C.¹ without appointing a successor. His four generals, Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy and Seleucus, fought amongst themselves for dominance until eventually, by 301 B.C. four smaller Greek Hellenistic kingdoms were formed: Cassander ruled Macedonia; Lysimachus ruled Thrace and northwestern Asia Minor; Seleucus ruled Syria and Babylonia; and Ptolemy ruled Egypt.²

It is at this point that the little horn makes its appearance on the scene of action.

IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE LITTLE HORN OF DANIEL 7 AND THE LITTLE HORN OF DANIEL 8?

Daniel 7:8-27; 8:9-25

A careful study of Daniel 8 in conjunction with Daniel 7 will establish a definite connection between the little horns in each respective chapter.

However, there is also a clear connection between the little horn of Daniel 8 and the fourth beast of Daniel 7, the prophetic

¹ Wikipedia, "Alexander the Great". http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great

² W. H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005), 176.





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predecessor to Daniel 7's little horn.

Shared Characteristics: The Fourth Beast & the Little Horn

The two characteristics that Daniel 8's little horn shares with the fourth beast of Daniel 7 are highlighted in the following table:

Shared Characteristic:	Daniel 7 Reference:	Daniel 8 Reference:
Succeeds the Grecian Empire	Vss. 7-8, 17	Vss. 8-9, 21-23
Expands Geographically	Vs. 7	Vs. 9

Shared Characteristics: The Two Little Horns

If the overlap between the little horn of Daniel 8 and the fourth beast of Daniel 7 seems unmistakable, there is even greater overlap between Daniel 8's little horn and Daniel 7's little horn – at least 11 points of overlap³:

Shared Characteristic:	Daniel 7 Reference:	Daniel 8 Reference:
Same Symbol – “Little Horn”	Vs. 8	Vs. 9
Start Small	Vs. 8	Vs. 9
Become Great	Vs. 20	Vs. 9
Persecutor	Vss. 21, 25	Vss. 10, 24
Target the Saints	Vss. 21, 25	Vss. 24
Self-exalting, Blasphemous	Vss. 8, 11, 20, 25	Vss. 10-12, 25
Human Characteristics	Vs. 8	Vss. 23-25
Vertical Expansion – Attack on God	Vss. 8-9, 21-22, 25-26	Vss. 12-14, 25
Subject to Prophetic Time	Vs. 25	Vss. 13-14
Extend to the Time of the End	Vss. 25-26	Vss. 17, 19
Face Supernatural Destruction	Vss. 11, 26	V. 25

From this brief comparison between Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, it becomes immediately evident that whoever the little horn of Daniel 8 is, this prophetic symbol condenses into one image the composite imagery of Daniel 7's fourth beast with its ten horns as well as the little horn, which grew up after the original ten horns.

³ W. H. Shea, *Symposium on Daniel*, Ed. F. B. Holbrook, (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1986), 187.



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IS THERE ANY INFORMATION IN DANIEL 8 ITSELF THAT CAN HELP IDENTIFY THE LITTLE HORN?

In addition to recognizing the similarity between the description of Daniel 7's fourth beast and its little horn in comparison with that of Daniel 8's little horn, perhaps one of the key observations coming out of Daniel 8 itself is the dual phase operation of the little horn.

Daniel 8's little horn seems to be depicted as having two consecutive phases of operation. The first is a horizontal, military expansion (Dan 8:9, 23). The second is a vertical, spiritual expansion (Dan 9:10-12, 24-25).

Our attention now needs to turn to understanding the two-phased description of Daniel 8's little horn in more detail.

Daniel 8:8-9, 21-23

First Phase (Horizontal) – Military / Political

The little horn of Daniel 8 is described as the successor to the goat, which is explicitly stated to symbolize the Grecian empire (Dan 8:8-9, 21-23). The little horn is pictured as arising out of one of the four winds before proceeding to expand militarily to increase its political jurisdiction "toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land" (Dan 8:9).

It is interesting to note that the directions of horizontal, imperial expansion, as described in Daniel 8:9, seem to indicate that this power would arise from the west. That is to say, coming from the west it would expand its borders "toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land."

The little horn is also described in 8:23 as arising in the "latter time of their kingdom" – the divisions of Greece.

These two prophetic characteristics give us an approximate chronological marker indicating when the little horn of Daniel 8 would arise – sometime toward the end of the reign of the four-part, divided Grecian kingdom – as well as a broad geographical marker indicating where this new entity would arise – from a territory west of the Grecian empire, necessitating expansion east, south and toward the Glorious Land.

When one considers the visions of Daniel 2, Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 in parallel with one another, it seems that the first phase of the little horn's antics (Dan 8:9) stands parallel to the legs of iron (Dan 2:33, 40) and the non-descript fourth beast with iron teeth (Dan 7:7, 23).

It is worth noting that in the vision of Daniel 8, the main burden of concern pertaining to the little horn does not seem to actually be the political / military phase. All things considered, very little is said about this aspect. Rather, the focus seems to be on the second phase of the



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little horn's antics.

Daniel 8:10-12, 24-25 *Second Phase – Spiritual / Religious*

In its second phase, the little horn launches a vertical attack directed at the “host of heaven”.

Even the Hebrew prepositions chosen by Daniel bear out the contrast between the horizontal and vertical phases of the little horn's antics. When speaking of the horizontal conquest phase, the word “*e*” (“to” or “toward”) is used. However, when speaking of the vertical spiritual phase, the word “*ad*” (“unto” or “up to”) is used.⁴

In addition to this, when describing the effects of the little horn's vertical assault, verses 10-12 speak numerous times of various elements being “cast down”. Thus the action of the little horn is described as exalting himself upward at the expense of other elements having to be cast downwards.

The second phase of the little horn's antics, which are directed vertically, are also described very clearly using spiritual language. For instance, the little horn seeks to exalt himself to the Prince of the host, he attacks the sanctuary, he takes away the daily services and he casts truth to the ground (Dan 8:11-12). All these words and concepts are religious or spiritual in nature.

Furthermore, the vertical direction of the attack is itself a symbol designed to highlight the spiritual nature of the attack in the same way that the horizontal direction of the first phase description is symbolic of the geographical, military / political expansion of imperial Rome.

Unequivocally, the second phase is spiritual by nature.

Incidentally, this dual-phased political and spiritual interpretation pertaining to the antics of the little horn in Daniel 8 seems to be validated by the visions in both Daniel 7 and Daniel 2.

For instance, in Daniel 2 the imagery of the iron, which represents the fourth world empire, continues beyond the legs into the feet, which are a mixture of iron and potter's clay (Dan 2:40-41). In other words, the Roman Empire is depicted as falling while yet, in some respect, continuing on after its fall. Combine this concept with the fact that the iron is specifically described as being mixed with potter's clay (Dan 2:41), which according to Isaiah 64:8 is a religious metaphor, and one essentially has the idea of the fourth kingdom's political dominance coming to an end while it continues on in some adapted form to dominate in spiritual and religious things.

⁴ Shea, *Symposium on Daniel*, 194.



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Similarly, if one were to consider all the characteristics of Daniel 7's fourth beast, including its horns and specifically the antics of its little horn, it becomes apparent that there is both a political phase and a spiritual phase to the fourth beast of Daniel 7. The ten horns on the fourth beast's head, which are present prior to the rise of the little horn, symbolize the termination of the fourth beast's political phase of domination by it being divided up (Dan 7:24). The little horn, which is part of the fourth beast insofar as it is pictured as growing out of it (Dan 7:8), is described in a decidedly religious tone indicating a new phase of spiritual domination (Dan 7:24-25).

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the little horn of Daniel 8 is pictured as passing through a period of political domination prior to a period of spiritual domination.

WHO IS THE LITTLE HORN OF DANIEL 8?

By way of review, the main lines of evidence under consideration for suggesting who is represented by the little horn of Daniel 8 is as follows:

1. The strong parallel that exists between the combined characteristics of Daniel 7's fourth beast with its little horn in comparison with the characteristics of Daniel 8's little horn.
2. The two-phased domination of Daniel 8's little horn – first political, second spiritual (a pattern also borne out in Daniel 7's combined symbolism of the fourth beast and its little horn).
3. The geographical region from whence the little horn comes.
4. The approximate time period that the little horn would rise to power.

In a previous study, the fourth beast of Daniel 7 was identified as imperial Rome. The little horn, which grew out of the fourth beast, was identified by a long list of characteristics as papal Rome.

Considering how much overlap there is between the characteristics of Daniel 8's little horn in comparison with the combined characteristics of Daniel 7's fourth beast with its little horn, the inescapable conclusion is that Daniel 8's little horn captures, in one symbol, the same entities and time period that is symbolized in Daniel 7 by the fourth beast and its little horn. That is to say, Daniel 8's little horn covers the entire history of pagan, political Rome as well as that of papal Rome throughout the middle ages.

This conclusion fits well with the concept of the little horn, in its first phase, rises to power toward the "latter time" of the divided



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Grecian empire (Dan 8:23) as well as the idea that it would arise from the west and expand “toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land” (Dan 8:9).

The identification of Daniel 8’s little horn as representing both imperial and papal Rome also fits well with the dual-phased horizontal-vertical expansion, which is symbolic for the little horn’s initial period of political domination and its successive period of spiritual domination.⁵

SUMMARY & APPEAL

John 8:32

Daniel 8 is an intriguing chapter. It begins by symbolically portraying the rise and fall of political kingdoms before going on to give specifics of one of the greatest religious counterfeits in history.

By comparing the various characteristics of Daniel 8’s little horn with those of the fourth beast in Daniel 7 along with its respective little horn, it becomes evident that Daniel 8’s little horn captures in one symbol the entire history of imperial and papal Rome.

Going beyond the actual identification of the little horn in Daniel 8, the vast majority of details describing the little horn’s antics focus on the spiritual phase – the Papacy.

The next study will examine the symbolism employed in Daniel 8:10-12 regarding the activities of the little horn. When the meaning of this enigmatic language is unlocked, amazing truths will be revealed regarding the divine plan of salvation, which is seemingly undermined by the little horn.

⁵ W. H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader’s Guide*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005), 173.



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