Daniel Chapter 8
Prophetic Dream of a Two-Horned Ram & One-Horned Male Goat:
Medo-Persian & Graeco-Macedonian Kingdoms

From Daniel 2:4 to 7:28 the language is Aramaic. Beginning with this chapter the book of Daniel returns to using the Hebrew language. This vision takes place in the 3rd year of Belshazzar that is two years after the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7. In this chapter we are introduced to the angel Gabriel who gives Daniel the interpretation of the vision. It is also Gabriel whom God sent to Mary to announce her pregnancy and virgin birth of Jesus [Luke 1:19, 26]. It appears that Gabriel is the angel who is responsible for the welfare of the Jewish people 1. The ministry of Gabriel is again prominent in Daniel chapter 9 where the entire history of God's dealing with Israel and the coming Messiah are summarized. Most of the prophecy in chapter 7 has already been fulfilled.

The vision before us in this chapter adds some details to the vision of the 2nd and 3rd beasts described in the previous chapter (silver & bronze kingdoms of chapter 2), the bear with three ribs in its teeth and the leopard with four heads and four wings. It describes the historical struggle between the East and West – the conflict between the Medo-Persian and the Graeco-Macedonian empires. Also described is a little horn coming out of the Greek Empire who is the Syrian Antiochus Epiphanes  the forerunner of the latter time little horn  from chapter 7 and the stern faced  king described in the last part of this chapter. He is a type of anti-Christ who despises God's people and seeks to destroy them.

Because the prophetic visions of Daniel have been so clearly and literally fulfilled, the liberal critic has promoted for a 'late date' for Daniel 2. That is, the events and characters described in the visions were documented after they happened and added to the book of Daniel after the fact. They would say that several people wrote this book. There is also a question among some scholars 'Did Shakespeare really write Shakespeare?' J. Vernon McGee in his commentary on the book of Daniel recounts Mark Twain's amusing response to that question. If Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare, it must have been written by another man of the same name! Well if Daniel did not write Daniel around 600 BC then it must have been written by another man of the same name at the same time!

vv. 1-4 ➤ Vision of the Ram with Two Horns

[In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me— to me, Daniel— after the one that appeared to me the first time. 2 I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. 3 Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. 4 I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no beast could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.]

[In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar...] This vision then occurs two years after the vision of the four beasts coming up out of the sea that are described in chapter 7. The year is 551 BC.

1 In Daniel chapter 10 we are introduced to another angel, the powerful archangel Michael, who is a chief prince over the Jewish people, charged with their protection. The archangel Michael plays a prominent role in the end time events concerning the nation of Israel and the Jews [Daniel 12:1 and Revelation 12:7].

2 For example, Porphyry, an anti-Christian philosopher during the 200's B.C., used the remarkably precise predictions about the reign, character and predecessors of Antiochus Epiphanes as proof that the book of Daniel could not have been written before that time. Although other modern critics also promote this view, this should not keep any faithful believer from accepting the traditional date.
Daniel was in Shushan\(^3\) (which is Susa), the capital of Media-Persia, in the citadel or palace fortress situated in the extreme western edge of the province of Elam (Persia, southern Iran) about 150 miles directly north of Kuwait. The River Ulai is the Kerkhah River, which flowed by Susa and together with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow into the Persian Gulf.

The question has been asked, "Why wasn’t Daniel in Babylon?" Probably for two reasons: (1) he was on a diplomatic assignment representing Babylon and (2) God wanted him in the place that would be the subject of the visions in the dream that He gave him.

The vision begins with a ram having two long horns standing beside the river. But one of the horns was higher than the other and that one comes up last. Whereas in chapter 7 the Medo-Persian Empire is depicted as a bear, here it is depicted as a ram with two long horns and is identified with Media-Persia in verse 20.

Note that the higher (of the two horns) came up last. Historically, this represents the kingdom of Media which came up first when Gobryas the Median general destroyed Babylon and Darius the Mede (often called Darius the Great) took power in 539 BC ruling over both Media and Persia until his death in 486 BC. In 522 BC Darius seized power in Persia after King Bardiya of Persia was murdered. Armies led by Darius put down a rebellion in Egypt in 519 BC. and conquered Thrace in southeastern Europe about 513 BC. Later, Persian forces conquered what is now southern Pakistan.

Darius extended the Persian Empire, which was based in southwest Asia, eastward into what is now Afghanistan and southern Pakistan and westward into southeastern Europe and so led Persia to prominence. Thus, the second horn (Persia) coming up last became larger.

This ram comes from the east and goes to the west, north and south. It comes from Media-Persia (Iran) and goes toward Babylon (Iraq) [west], Lydia/Asia Minor [north] and Egypt [south]. These are probably the three ribs in the mouth of the bear (see below).

No beast, that is other nation, will be able to stand against this ram, that is, the Medes and the Persians. Not only that, no other kingdom will able to deliver the attacked kingdoms out of the their hands. Because of this might and power, the ram (Medo-Persia) will do as it pleases it is a law unto itself. Daniel 7:5 says of this beast

"And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'"

However, the ram (or bear) does not retain power forever and is superceded by another, stronger, faster beast.

---

\(^3\) Archaeologists unearthed the famous Code of Hammurabi, which is a group of Babylonian laws, in the ruins of Susa in 1901 and 1902. The story of Esther also occurs here (Esther 1:2).
Daniel Chapter 8  
Klaus G. Schiessel © June 2005

v. 5-8 ➤ Vision of the Goat with a Single Horn on its Forehead

[5 And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes.  6 Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power.  7 And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand.  8 Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.]

As the ram with the two horns advances, another animal comes from the west⁴. It is a goat with a large horn on its forehead – a unigoat. It was moving so fast that it was as if it was gliding above the surface of the whole earth. This is a reference to the speed as which the Greek army moved.

The ram saw the goat and attacks it in a furious rage. As the goat confronts the ram, he is moved with rage against the ram attacking him and breaking both its horns (Media & Persia). Historically this occurred when Darius's son, Xerxes I the last ruler of Media-Persia, attacked Greece with a massive army that included men and their families. His army was defeated at Thermopylae, a very narrow gorge north of Athens, and his navy was destroyed in the Bay of Salamis by a combination of a storm and the Greek navy. (See also Historical Notes in the Appendix).

In contrast to the previous power of the ram (v. 4), it is now defeated by a stronger and much swifter opponent, cast to the ground and trampled upon. The male goat grows very great but in its prime he became strong. His large horn is broken.

The goat with a prominent horn is identified as the first king of Javan (Ionia or Greece) in verse 21 and the four other horns as his successors in verse 22.

The prominent horn on the goat was Alexander the Great, the first great king of Greece and military genius who was only 32 when he died; the broken horn. The four conspicuous horns rise up in its place and spread to the four corners of the earth and historically we know these were Alexander's four generals. Refer to notes on verse 22.

---

⁴ During the 490's BC., Greeks in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) rebelled unsuccessfully against Persian rule. In 492 BC., a Persian attempt to invade Greece failed. In 490 BC., Darius I (the Great) sent another expedition to conquer Greece. The army landed northeast of Athens on the plain of Marathon. The Greeks, though outnumbered, defeated the Persians. Darius died before he could organize another invasion of Greece. His son Xerxes I succeeded him. Perhaps Alexander the Great's conquest of Media-Persia was driven by a "pay back" attitude.
9 And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. 10 And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. 11 He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. 12 Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered.

One of the notable horns in verse 8 spreads exceedingly great toward the south (Syria), the east (Babylonia & Persia) and the Glorious Land (Israel). This is reference to one of Alexander the Great’s generals, Seleucus, who took control of Syria (south), Babylonia & Persia (east) and founded the Seleucid dynasty. He built an empire that lasted from 323 B.C. until the Romans conquered it in 30 B.C.

In the second century B.C. the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes IV (who reigned from 171 – 164 B.C.), invaded the Glorious Land, Israel, and persecuted the Jews. He was the son of Antiochus the Great and sometimes called Epimanes – the madman. He forbade the practice of all Jewish religious rites and sacrifices and desecrated the pouring swine broth over the holy vessels in the temple. He also placed an image of Jupiter Olympus in the Temple.

Antiochus exalted himself as the Prince of the Host in the sense that he stood in the place of God (or perhaps the High Priest). By reason of his pride the daily sacrifices were taken away and the sanctuary fell into disrepair. Additionally, because of wickedness he was able to build an army to impose his policies and prevent the reinstitution of the Jewish sacrificial system. The warfare included the spiritual realm where angels and demons were involved.

Truth was not esteemed or honored right and wrong were relative and deception was the norm. The little horn would promote a culture that called evil good and good evil. In Isaiah 5:20 God declares

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! This is what Antiochus did.

Interestingly enough, the prophecy described here contains a two-fold interpretation. In the immediate scriptural context it refers to the successor of the notable horn described in verse 8 – the Syrian king and general Antiochus Epiphanes. But in a parallel context it refers to the ultimate little horn described in Daniel 7:8,11 and later in verses 23-25 of this chapter as a king of stern countenance who (1) exalts himself as the Prince of the Host [Messiah] and (2) stands up against the Prince of princes in other words the anti-Christ. Some of the feats attributed to Antiochus are astounding, perhaps demonic in nature.

In both cases, the individuals take away the sacrificial system and desecrate the temple (sanctuary in verse 11) and elevate themselves in attitude above God. More will be discussed regarding this in the notes on verses 23-25 and Daniel 9:9:27. Jesus refers to this person and event in Matthew 24:14-21. {Compare verse 10 with Revelation 12:3,4}. 

Daniel Chapter 8  
Klaus G. Schiessel © June 2005
v. 13,14 ➔ **DURATION OF THE LITTLE HORN’S OCCUPATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION**

[13 Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, “How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled under foot?” 14 And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”]

Daniel hears a holy one speaking who may have been a watcher an angelic being responsible for carrying out God’s purposes in the affairs of men. Refer to notes on Daniel 4:13-17.

One of the angelic beings asks the other one, “How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled under foot?” The answer is given and Daniel records it here.

The little horn Antiochus Epiphanes, will have power over the sanctuary for 2300 days or 6 years, 4 months and 20 days. This is consistent with Antiochus’ reign from 171 to 164 B.C. and allowing for several months before his policies were put into effect.

In contrast, the anti-Christ will receive power and a kingdom for 1260 days or 42 months or 3 years and 6 months. Refer to Daniel 7:25, 9:27, 12:7 and Revelation 13:5.

After this period of 2300 days the sanctuary will be cleansed and restored. These events happened historically during the days of the Maccabees when a family of brothers and a father by that name started a Jewish revolt that eventually overthrew the army of Antiochus.

The temple was cleaned out and only enough oil that would feed the lampstand for one day was available. But the oil burned miraculously for 8 days until more oil could be made. This is how the Jewish celebration of Hanukah or Feast of Dedication was started also referred to as Festival of Lights. Jesus came to Jerusalem during one such celebration {John 10:22,23}. This is a feast that is not mentioned in the Old Testament because it was established during the inter-testament period (~ 164 B.C.).

---

5 Feast of Dedication (Heb. hanukka). In 1 Maccabees 4:52-59 it is called “the dedication of the altar,” and by Josephus (Ant. 12.7.7) “the Feast of Lights.” It was a popular and joyous festival commemorating the purifying of the Temple, the removal of the old polluted altar, and the restoration of the worship of Jehovah by Judas Maccabeus, 164 B.C. This feast began on the 25th Chislev (December) and lasted eight days but did not require attendance at Jerusalem. Assembled in the Temple or in the synagogues of the places where they resided, the Jews sang “Hallel,” carrying palms and other branches; and there was a grand illumination of the Temple and private houses. The origin of the illumination of the Temple is unknown, although tradition says that when the sacred “lampstands” of the restored Temple were to be lighted only one flagon of oil, sealed with the signet of the high priest, was found to feed the lamps. This was pure oil, but only sufficient for one day-- when by a miracle the oil increased, and the flagon remained filled for eight days, in memory of which the Temple and private houses were ordered to be illuminated for the same period.
v. 15-19  ➤  THE ANGEL GABRIEL COMES TO REVEAL THE MEANING OF THE VISION

[15 Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. 16 And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, “Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.” 17 So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, “Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end.” 18 Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright. 19 And he said, “Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be.”]

Angels appear in the form of men. There was a voice coming from רֵּאֵל between the banks of the Ulai indicating someone in a boat or Ī standing on the water⁶! Perhaps this voice is that of Jehovah who would later come to earth clothed in flesh to die for the sinful nature of mankind.

The angel Gabriel tells Daniel that the timing of these visions is for רֵּאֵל.the time of the end.⁷ That is, the events of the end times that Jesus called רֵּאֵלGreat Tribulation⁷ {Matthew 24:21}.

Daniel is going to be told what will happen in the latter time of God’s indignation {lit. שׁוֹפָהַת פְּרָעָה שׁוֹפָה, שׁוֹפָהַת מֹתוֹק שׁוֹפָה} that is His wrath and anger against a rebellious world. These things will happen at the time that God has established.

vv. 20  ➤  THE IDENTITY OF THE TWO-HORNED RAM

[20 “The ram which you saw, having the two horns – they are the kings of Media and Persia.⁸]

The two horns of the ram in the vision represented the kings of Media and Persia (modern Iran and western Afghanistan). This empire lasted from 539 to 324 BC {~215 years} beginning from the time that the Persian general Gobryas conquered Babylon and Darius the Mede was given the kingdom by the Persian king, Cyrus the Great.

vv. 21,22  ➤  THE IDENTITY OF THE MALE GOAT WITH A GREAT HORN ON ITS FOREHEAD

[21 “And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.]⁹

The angel Gabriel now explains the vision described in verse 5-8.

The male goat is the kingdom of Greece⁷ and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. This is a reference to Alexander the Great who conquered the Medo-Persian empire in 324 BC after a 10 year campaign. His empire extended from Greece to India and lasted from 324 to 146 BC when the Romans took control of Greece.

⁶ The River Ulai is the Kerkhah River, which flowed by Susa and together with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow into the Persian Gulf.

⁷ The actual Hebrew word used here is [3120 Yavan] Javan = "Ionía". Javan was a son of Japheth and grandson of Noah and his descendents migrated north and east into Turkey and Europe.
However, one year later he died of complications due to a nightlong drinking binge (in the prime of his strength at about age 32, see v. 8) although some have claimed he died of complications due to syphilis. Either way, he appears to have lacked self-control.

After Alexander's death, the extensive empire under his domination was divided between his four generals: (1) Cassander [who was married to Alexander's sister] took Macedonia; (2) Lysimachus took Asia Minor [Turkey]; (3) Seleucus took Syria, Babylon & Persia [out of which comes the a little horn described in Daniel 8:9-14] and finally, (4) Ptolemy took Egypt [out of which Cleopatra later came]. These are represented by the four wings of the leopard described in Daniel 7:6 and the four notable ones (horns) in verse 8. However, none of these had the same power as Alexander.

The period of Greek history following Alexander's death is known as the Hellenistic Age. During that time, Greek culture continued to influence the lands Alexander had conquered, but Eastern Oriental ideas were imported back to Greece. Greece suffered from frequent warfare and widespread destruction during the 200's BC. The city-states formed two associations to fight for independence. But Macedonian kings kept control of Greece, and the two associations fought each other. All of this was building up for a Roman conquest.

**HISTORY HAS PROVED THAT DANIEL'S PROPHECY IS 100% ACCURATE!**

**vv. 23-25 ➤ THE “STERN-FACED” KING – THE COMING ANTI-CHRIST**

[23] “And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. 24 His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. 25 Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human means.”]

In the latter days a unique king will arise having fierce features. The Hebrew word for fierce or stern here [5794 `az (az)] comes from a word meaning stout, strong, vehement, harsh. The picture here is of a tough, stern, unsympathetic individual.

This occurs during a time when the transgressors or lawless ones, those who delight in their disobedience against God's standards, have reached their peak. Paul describes this as the mystery of iniquity in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-7.

This king is the little horn in Daniel 7:8 and unlike verses 9-12, which refer to his forerunner Antiochus Epiphanes, here I believe it is a reference to the lawless-one, the man of sin, the anti-Christ who denies that Jesus is the Christ {1 John 2:22,23}. He sits himself up in the rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem insisting he is God and is to be worshipped {refer to 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4}.

---

8 This is similar to the teaching of Sun Myung Moon (Moonies) who founded the Unification Church and who taught that Jesus failed in His mission of salvation because He was put to death on cross prior to accomplishing it. Moon teaches that he was chosen by God to complete the work that Jesus started. In so doing he has effectively denied that Jesus is the Messiah (i.e., the One anointed to save) and in so doing was anti-Christ.
“His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power...”] The anti-Christ's power is not innate as that of a mere man, he will be supernaturally empowered. Refer to 2 Thessalonians 2:9,10 and Revelation 6:1,2; 13:1,2.

“he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive...”] The word used here for destroy means to decay or bring to ruin. The NAS renders this as destroy to an extraordinary degree the TEV dreadful destruction and the RSV fearful destruction. The anti-Christ will bring ruin and decay to all that oppose him.

This king will be extremely successful and promoted in all that he does. He will destroy wonderfully, amazingly and marvelously. We know that the anti-Christ will also have the help of the false prophet (see Revelation 13:11-17).

“he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people.”] Note that the anti-Christ will be especially antagonistic towards the holy people that is, Daniel's people the Jews. This is consistent with both Jesus discourse on the end times (Matthew 24:15-24) and Revelation 12:13-17; 13:7,8.

“who understands sinister schemes...”] The NIV renders this master of intrigue the NAS skilled in intrigue the KJV and ASV understanding dark sentences and the TLB great shrewdness and intelligence. In other words, he will be a master at scheming and conspiring to bring about his agenda. He could be likened in character to the evil and sinister Chancellor Palpatine (a.k.a. the emperor) in the Star Wars trilogy.

“He shall even rise against the Prince of princes...”] That is, He will attempt to usurp the authority of the Messiah (Daniel 11:36; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:5,6; 19:11-19) and persecute His followers (e.g., Acts 9:1-5).

“...but he shall be broken without human means.”] The LORD Himself will bring the reign of the anti-Christ to an end (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:20,21). Just like the stone cut without human hands destroys the golden image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

vv. 26, 27 ➢ THE VISION EXHAUSTS DANIEL & HE IS SICK SEVERAL DAYS

“...And the vision of the evenings and mornings which was told is true; therefore seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future.” 27 And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.

Apparently this vision lasted all night into the morning and Daniel is told to seal up the vision. Why? Because it is for the distant future. As these events unfold there fulfillment will become obvious despite the skeptics' criticism of the prophetically historic accuracy of this book. As we have seen in the parallel passages of the book of Revelation, these prophetic visions span to the end times all the way to the Second Coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This dream and the visions contained in them were so overwhelming that Daniel fainted and was sick. For days his physical and psychological health suffered. Small wonder the rise and fall of powerful world kingdoms was revealed. Gentile kingdoms at that!
To a faithful Jew who understood God’s plans for Israel, the description of all these Gentile nations prominently portrayed in history was an enigma. How is God going to mesh His plans for Israel into his plans for the Gentile nations? The answer is actually quite simple and a hint is given in Daniel 7:13,14

Daniel 7:13,14

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

God’s intent is that representatives of all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. And they will. God is calling out Jews and Gentiles from the world into His kingdom—a mystery hidden to the Old Testament prophets. As Paul writes to the Ephesians

Ephesians 3:3-6

But at this time Daniel remained puzzled at the vision and neither he nor anyone else understood it.

When Daniel finally got over his sickness and he regained his strength he went back to his legislative business for the king {Belshazzar}. However, 12 years later {539 BC} Daniel would be on hand at a pagan party to interpret some ‘handwriting on the wall’ and be on hand to watch the Medes and Persians conquer Babylon. On to Daniel Chapter 5!

Bibliography

(3) Adam Clarke Commentary.
(4) Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament, Cook Communications Ministries; Copyright © 1983, 2000.
(6) Barnes Notes.
APPENDIX: HISTORICAL NOTES

Darius I (550?-486 B.C.) ruled the Persian Empire from 522 B.C. until his death. He is often called Darius the Great. Darius extended the Persian Empire, which was based in southwest Asia, eastward into what is now southern Pakistan and westward into southeastern Europe. He tried to conquer Greece, but failed.

Darius seized the Persian throne after King Bardiya of Persia was murdered in 522 B.C. Armies led by Darius put down a rebellion in Egypt in 519 B.C. and conquered Thrace in southeastern Europe about 513 B.C. Later, Persian forces conquered what is now southern Pakistan. Darius efficiently ruled his empire by dividing it into 20 satrapies (provinces). The officials he chose to govern the satrapies raised taxes locally for the royal treasuries and provided Darius with soldiers.

During the 500's B.C., the Persian Empire expanded rapidly and conquered the Greek city-states in Asia Minor. During the 499-494 BC., Greek city-states in Asia Minor (now Turkey) rebelled unsuccessfully against Persian rule. King Darius I of Persia crushed the revolt and sent his army to punish Athens, which had aided the rebels.

However, another Persian attempt to invade Greece in 492 B.C. failed. In 490 B.C., Darius sent another expedition to conquer Greece. The army landed northeast of Athens on the plain of Marathon. The Athenian army was outnumbered by the Persians but it defeated the Persian army at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. Darius died before he could organize another invasion of Greece. His son Xerxes I succeeded him.

In 480 B.C., King Xerxes I, the son of Darius I, led a massive Persian invasion of Greece with his army and their families totaling about 300,000 people. Many of the Greek city-states united under Sparta's leadership to fight the invaders. The Persians were defeated at Thermopylae, a very narrow pass north of Athens by a much smaller but more disciplined Greek army. The Greek navy followed a plan of the Athenian statesman Themistocles and withdrew to the Bay of Salamis. There, the Persian fleet of 300 ships was destroyed by a storm and sank. Xerxes returned to Persia with many of his troops that survived these defeats. The Greeks defeated the remaining Persian forces in 479 B.C.


Xerxes I, pronounced ZURK seez (519?-465 BC.), ruled the Persian Empire from 486 BC. until his death. He succeeded his father, Darius I, and spent several years trying to achieve his father's goal of conquering Greece. However, Xerxes failed to do so, and his struggles against the Greeks greatly weakened the influence and power of the Persian Empire.

During the early years of his reign, Xerxes put down revolts in the Persian provinces of Babylonia and Egypt. Then he began to assemble a huge land and sea force to invade Greece. This force included more than 180,000 men drawn from all over the empire, which then stretched as far west as Libya and as far east as the Indus River in what is now Pakistan.
In 480 BC., Xerxes led his army against a Greek force in a mountain pass at Thermopylae, northwest of Athens. The Greeks, led by troops from Sparta, held back the Persians until a traitor told Xerxes of another way through the mountains. The Persians attacked the Greeks from the rear and defeated them. The people of Athens then abandoned their great city. Xerxes burned many temples and other buildings in Athens.

Soon afterward, the Greeks and Persians fought in the Bay of Salamis. The Greeks had fewer ships but were better trained than the Persians for maneuvering in the small bay. Xerxes watched from a hillside on shore as the Greeks crushed his fleet. Then he fled to his western capital in Asia Minor (now Turkey).

In 479 BC., Persian forces attacked the Greeks at Plataea, west of Athens, and were again defeated. In 467 or 466 BC., Greek soldiers and seamen defeated Persian forces again at the mouth of the Eurymedon River, on the southern coast of Asia Minor. As a result a group of Persian nobles murdered Xerxes.


Alexander the Great.

Macedonia, a country north of Greece, was becoming stronger as Greece grew weaker. In 353 B.C., Philip II, king of Macedonia, set out to conquer Greece. Greek independence ended in 338 B.C., when Macedonia defeated the Greeks in the Battle of Chaeronea. Philip planned to lead a Greek and Macedonian army against Persia but he was killed by a Macedonian in 336 B.C.

Alexander the Great, Philip's son, succeeded his father at the age of 20. In 334 B.C., Alexander carried out Philip's plan to invade Persia. In a brilliant campaign, Alexander conquered the entire Persian Empire in less than 10 years. His empire extended from Greece to India. Alexander's conquests furthered the spread of Greek ideas and the Greek way of life to Egypt and the Near East. Alexander died in 323 B.C. His generals divided his empire into successor states, with Greece remaining under Macedonian control.

The period of Greek history following Alexander's death is known as the Hellenistic Age. The period lasted until 146 B.C. in Greece, when the Romans took control of Greece. During that time, Greek culture continued to influence the lands Alexander had conquered, and Eastern ideas reached Greece. Greece suffered from frequent warfare and widespread destruction during the 200's B.C. The city-states formed two associations to fight for independence. But Macedonian kings kept control of Greece, and the two associations fought each other.