

## The Roman Emperor in Daniel 8

### Background

In the previous newsletters I have shown that the power described in Daniel 8:9-12 is the Roman Empire. However, in the interpretation part, Daniel 8:23-25 a specific emperor is portrayed. Thus, the vision describes the *power* whereas the interpretation depicts the *ruler* of this empire.

The biblical concept of describing something twice with different perspectives is used to strengthen our understanding of the passage as a whole. If the emperor described fits well to the portrayed empire, our interpretation stands on firm ground. So let us look at the description of this emperor in Daniel 8:23-25:

*In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. (NIV)*

It is not hard to see that this passage concerns a specific person. Initially it says that he is “a stern-faced king” (NIV) or one who has “fierce features” (NKJV). This emperor is mean, cruel and harsh. In our study of the “vision part” of Daniel 8 we found that the timing here was the time of Christ’s ministry. According to historical knowledge, the ruler of the Roman Empire at that time was Caesar Tiberius. Most commentators believe that he reigned from A.D. 14–37. Therefore we conclude that Tiberius was the emperor in charge during Jesus’ ministry and death. This is confirmed by the Bible as well. The gospel of Luke mentions his name at the time of Jesus’ baptism, Luke 3:1-3:

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (NIV)*

It is no coincidence that Luke gives this information. Our compassionate God gave us the Caesar’s name to let us understand the historical timing for Jesus’ ministry and also help us better understand the book of Daniel.

### Caesar Tiberius

Let’s go back and see what Daniel 8:23-25 says about Tiberius. It gives a very good portrait of his characteristics. He is generally considered to have been very evil, especially towards the end of his life. He was the adopted son of Caesar Augustus. Normally a son by lineage would become the next emperor. Tiberius, however, used *intrigue* without violence to secure that position for himself.

It is true that he became very strong but what does the phrase “but not by his own power” mean? This phrase indicates that the devil used him as his puppet in a very specific way. The next phrase says that Tiberius “will destroy the mighty men.” The word “men” is added. It is not in the Hebrew text. The word for “the mighty” could also be translated “the countless.” Just a few sentences later it says that this emperor will take

his stand “against the Prince of princes.” That sure sounds similar to the “Lord of lords” and Tiberius was ultimately in charge when Christ was crucified. Therefore, I wonder if “the mighty” or “the countless” possibly also refers to Christ.

In the last part of Daniel 8:25 we read that this emperor “will be destroyed but not by human power.” That is a fitting description to Caesar Tiberius’ death. He died slowly of a chronic disease. He had pus-filled sores all over his body and became insane and paranoid. During this time he executed many, even people who were his friends. He was hated for this and everybody waited for him to die. Thus, he was not destroyed “by human power;” no one killed him. He died of natural causes and consequences.

## **Daniel 11**

Here it is important to build a bridge to Daniel 11. Our denomination generally interprets Daniel 11:16 to describe the Roman Empire. This power is introduced with the expression “the invader.” After referring to the power, the different rulers are described one by one. Daniel 11:17-19 speaks about Julius Caesar. His life and death is portrayed in three verses. He was succeeded by Caesar Augustus, 11:20, and again a short summary of his life and death is given. The most important part of his life according to the Bible was the taxation of the whole Roman Empire, including Judea. This made it necessary for Josef and Mary to go to Bethlehem. So this text describes the situation at the birth of Christ more than 500 years in advance! Let us read Daniel 11:20:

*His **successor** will send out a **tax collector** to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle. (NIV)*

(We know that Caesar Augustus died of a disease which makes the last phrase fit very well to his death.) Compare this text to Luke 2:1-2:

*In those days **Caesar Augustus** issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while **Quirinius** was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (NIV)*

Luke gives us the name of the Roman emperor at the time of Jesus’ birth. History books tell us that Caesar Augustus reigned from B.C. 31 to A.D.14 supporting that he was in power when the Messiah was born. So Daniel 11:16-20 describes the life and death of the first two Roman emperors; Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus. Verse 21 clearly introduces the next ruler with the words “his successor” or “he will be succeeded by.” This shows that they come one after the other in the order described.

So who is the next emperor on the Roman Stage after Augustus? Yes, Tiberius! He is introduced in Daniel 11:21. The following verses in detail portray his life and reign and his death is accurately described in 11:45. It says that “he will come to his end and no one will help him.” As I mentioned earlier, everyone eagerly anticipated the death of this hated emperor Tiberius. No one wanted to help him.

You may not have seen this before but as I compare the rulers described in Daniel 8:23-25 and 11:21-45 I see some pretty convincing details – similarities telling me that it is the same person, namely Tiberius, described in both places.

### **Daniel 8**

Fierce features 8:23  
Master of intrigue 8:23  
Mighty 8:24  
Destroy fearfully 8:24  
Prosper 8:24  
Cunning  
Deceive 8:25  
Exalt himself 8:25  
Destroy many 8:25  
Attack prosperity 8:25  
Rise against the Prince of princes 8:25

### **Daniel 11**

Vile person 11:21  
Seize kingdom by intrigue 11:21, 34  
Do as he pleases 11:36  
Attack the strongest fortresses 11:39  
Prosper 11:28, 36  
Corrupt with flattery 11:32  
Deceitful 11:23  
Exalt himself 11:36  
Destroy many 11:44  
Attack the richest provinces 11:24  
Blaspheme against the God of gods 11:36

As you easily can see, the description is almost identical! This list could be made much longer if we would include Daniel 8:9-14 and compare it with Daniel 11. Below are a few examples:

Took away the daily sacrifice 8:11-13  
Trample on the sanctuary 8:13

Took away the daily sacrifice 11:31  
Defile the sanctuary 11:31

### **Conclusion**

With this study we have established that the “king” in Daniel 8:23-25 fits very well to Emperor Tiberius. He was the ruler “in charge” during Christ’s ministry and death. With this understanding we have also confirmed our previous study that the “power” in Daniel 8:9-12 refers to the Roman Empire. Thus the vision and the interpretation in Daniel 8 are in harmony. We have also laid a foundation for future studies of Daniel 10-12.

In the next newsletters we will study what the intriguing words “desolation” and “abomination” mean and eventually put them together in a meaningful way.

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