

“God Prepares the World”
(Daniel 8)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation. Last week, we saw the completion of the OT canon.

1. After the Lord delivered His people from their enemies through Esther, Mordecai and Ahasuerus, He had that history committed to writing for at least two reasons:
 - a. It would serve to encourage His church that He is faithful to do everything He has promised: if we will simply trust in the Lord, He will take care of us as He said He would.
 - b. But it would also serve as evidence to indict His people if they should turn and break His covenant:
 - (i) It was a record of their disobedience so that when the Lord would pursue His lawsuit against them, He would have the necessary evidence.
 - (ii) This would also form part of His legal brief when he brought Israel into court to convict and condemned them for murdering His Son: “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall *the guilt of* all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Matt. 23:34-36).
 - (iii) They did this even in light of all the kindness He showed them following the Exile.
2. Then He closed the canon with one more prophetic book: Malachi.
 - a. The Lord not only records what He has done, He also shows His people what He will do.
 - (i) Through Malachi, the Lord revealed that the Day of the Lord was coming: the day of His lawsuit.
 - (a) It would destroy all the wicked like chaff.
 - (b) But it would also bring deliverance for those who trusted in the Lord.
 - (ii) Before that day, the Lord would send Elijah the prophet to turn the people from their sins and to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.
 - (a) John the Baptist was Elijah who was to come (Matt. 11:14).
 - (b) He prepared the way before the Messiah by preaching repentance.
 - (c) Then Jesus came and testified of the Gospel of grace.
 - (d) He sent His disciples to preach and teach in all the cities of the Roman Empire.

- (e) And after the Lord had gathered His wheat into His barn; He sent the unquenchable fire of judgment to burn up the chaff in 70 AD.
 - (f) The Lord told them this in advance, so that they would be ready and watching.
 - (g) In the meantime, they were to live according to Moses (the Law and the Prophets, the OT Scriptures), until these things took place.
- b. Let's not forget how the fact that they were then to live for 400 years without new revelation helps us to understand where we are today.
- (i) The NT canon closed with the book of Revelation; we are also living in a period of silence.
 - (ii) That doesn't mean we don't know what's going to happen or what the Lord wants us to do – He's told us.
 - (a) We know that the Lord intends for His kingdom to continue to grow through the preaching of the Gospel until it fills the whole earth (Matt. 13).
 - (b) We know that He has commissioned the church – that's us, as well as everyone everywhere under heaven who calls on the name of the Lord – to work to get His Gospel out to all the nations until all of them have been discipled (Matt. 28:18-20).
 - (c) And we know that after this work is done, the Lord will return to make all things new again.
 - (d) In the meantime, we are to do our very best to live up to His calling, according to His Word, until our time on earth is over.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we're moving into that time frame where there is no inspired history: the 400 years of silence between the closing of the canon and the breaking of that silence by the appearance of the angels to announce the coming of John and Christ, and the preaching of John the Baptist.
 - a. But though the Spirit of prophecy ceased, as we saw last week, and there is no inspired record of what happened during this time, that doesn't mean we're left entirely in the dark.
 - (i) The Lord told His people in advance through the prophets what He intended to do, as we've seen and as we've read in our text.
 - (ii) Secular historians have left us a record of that time frame.
 - (iii) And some of the authors of the New Testament made references to these events.
 - b. What do we know?
 - (i) We know there would be at least two more world revolutions that would take place before Messiah came to set up the last world empire: the Lord would first raise up Greece, and then the Roman Empire, at which time, He would send His Son.
 - (ii) We also know the Lord had a plan to use these two kingdoms in some way to advance His kingdom.

2. Let's begin by looking at the rise of the Grecian Empire and how the Lord used it to prepare for the coming kingdom of His Son.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider briefly the rise of the third world power: Greece.

1. Review.

- a. Babylon was the first of the four kingdoms revealed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, represented by the head of gold; it was the kingdom that took Israel into captivity.
- b. Persia was the second kingdom represented by the chest and arms of silver – also the Ram with two horns, the Medes and the Persian, as we saw in Daniel 8 – this was the kingdom that overthrew Babylon, and allowed God's people to return to the Promised Land to rebuild their temple and the walls to their city. It was also the kingdom under which the Jews were able to destroy many of their enemies.

2. Greece was the third empire.

- a. It was the kingdom represented by the belly and thighs of bronze, and by the male goat of Daniel 8, and was the kingdom that overthrew Persia.
 - (i) It was the only country that had successfully resisted Persia's attempt to overthrow them – first through Leonidas of Sparta, and then through Themistocles of Athens.
 - (ii) Greece continued to grow as a world power until it was able to overthrow Persia through the leadership of Alexander the Great, about seventy years after Malachi's prophecy, and about 330 years before Christ came into the world.
 - (iii) This was the third of four world revolutions the Lord would use to prepare for Christ's coming.
- b. It was prophesied that Alexander's conquest would be quick and his empire greater than what came before.
 - (i) The four kingdoms are represented as four beasts in Daniel 7.
 - (a) Daniel writes concerning Greece, "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it" (Dan. 7:6).
 - (b) The wings represent the swiftness of his victory, while the fact that he has four of them, as well as four heads, indicates what would happen after his death, as we'll see in a moment and next Lord's Day.
 - (ii) Greece is also represented as a male goat in our text.
 - (a) "While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat *had* a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of

the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven” (Dan. 8:5-8).

- (b) He comes from the west over the surface of the whole earth – Greece is west of Persia, the then reigning world power.
- (c) The fact that he doesn’t touch the ground shows the swiftness of his victory.
- (d) The one large horn is Greece’s first king, Alexander, “The shaggy goat *represents* the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king” (v. 21).
- (e) And the fact that it is broken represents his death at an early age, while the four horns that come up after it show that his kingdom would be divided between four of his captains.
- (f) Next week, we’ll consider these four horns. But for now,

B. Let’s consider, second, how the Lord used Greece to prepare for the coming kingdom of His Son:

- 1. Its main contribution was its spread of Greek culture (Hellenizing) throughout the world, particularly, the Greek language.
 - a. We all know how difficult it can be to communicate across language barriers. (*E.g.*, weekend in Tijuana).
 - b. The Lord removed that barrier, for the most part, by allowing one language to be imposed on the world, a language this is extremely precise, that would be suitable to reveal and explain His Son and His work.
 - c. This would also make it easier to preach the Gospel to all the nations.
 - (i) The gift of tongues allowed the first generation of preachers to communicate across language barriers, as it did on the Day of Pentecost. But not everyone had that gift, nor could those who did use it whenever they wished.
 - (ii) Having a common language overcame this difficulty. It also allowed the churches to communicate more easily with each other.
 - (iii) Example: Latin used to be the international language of scholarship. If you wrote a book in Latin, any scholar in the Western world could read it, whether he lived in England, Germany or France.
 - (iv) Communication is easy when you all speak the same language.
 - d. This common language also made the books of the NT more accessible to the whole church, since they could all understand the language in which they were written.

2. Along these same lines, the Greek language also gave the Jews in every land access to the Old Testament.
 - a. For the first time, the Scriptures (the Old Testament in particular) were translated into Greek.
 - (i) We call this translation the Septuagint, because it was supposedly done by seventy translators.
 - (ii) It was produced in Alexandria, Egypt, from about 280 BC to 200 or 150 BC.
 - (iii) Now this was important for at least three reasons:
 - (a) First, it gives us insight into the Hebrew texts that are much older than those we now have. Actually, it confirms for us just how accurate our Hebrew texts are.
 - (b) Second, this translation became the means by which the Greek language was wedded to Hebrew thought, opening the door for the authors of the NT to communicate the OT Scripture more effectively in Greek.
 - (c) Third, and most important, it provided the translation of the OT Scriptures that were most often quoted by the NT authors.
 - b. The Word of God had been locked up in the Hebrew language from the Greek speaking Jews – those Jews living outside the land of Palestine, who had been born and raised among those who spoke Greek; but now it was translated into a common language that would be understood by a majority of the world.
 - (i) This was the translation the Jews used in the synagogues outside of Judea.
 - (ii) The fact that the whole OT could now be read in an understandable language also prepared the way for Christ’s kingdom, since the apostles as they preached could make reference to the OT, especially the prophecies regarding Christ, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.
 - (iii) This made it easier to preach to the Greek speaking Gentiles as well. In virtually all their quotations from the OT in their letters to the Gentile churches, they used the LXX.
 - (iv) It was a sound and authoritative translation: the meaning was the same, only different words were used, as in our more modern translations.
 - (a) Christ Himself quoted from the LXX, showing us that the Word of God doesn’t lose any authority because it is translated into another language.
 - (b) This translation continued to be used by the Christian church for several hundred years after Christ.
 - c. The Lord used the Greek Empire to pave the way – linguistically – for the revelation of His Son and the subsequent proclamation of the Gospel.
 - d. The Grecian Empire brought many challenges as well, as we’ll see next time, but this was their contribution to the kingdom of heaven.
3. In closing, let’s consider two things:

- a. First, that though our Bibles are translations from the original languages, they are still the Word of God.
 - (i) We've all been challenged on this point at one time or another: we can't read the original languages; we can't be sure what we're reading is what God said.
 - (ii) But we do have good translations that open the meaning of God's Word to us.
 - (iii) We can know as we read them that they come to us with the same authority as the originals, just as we know Jesus quoted from the Septuagint without apology.

- b. Second, that the Lord has opened the door for us to reach many of the nations of the world with the Gospel in two ways because we have a language that we share in common: English.
 - (i) The Lord has brought many people to this nation from so many countries that learn to speak English.
 - (a) We don't all need to go overseas to do missionary work: there's a great deal of work to do in our own backyard.
 - (b) The fact that they learn English makes it easier to communicate with them: again consider how difficult it would be to do this across language barriers (*e.g.*, communicating the Gospel to the old man through the young boy).

 - (ii) The Lord has also made English an influential language in many countries around the world.
 - (a) *E.g.*, my brother-in-law Warren met his wife teaching English in China.
 - (b) When you couple this fact with the extent to which the internet has spread around the globe, we can reach people in many different countries from the comfort of our own building because we all know English.

- c. The Lord used a common language to spread His Gospel throughout the Roman Empire when He first brought His Son into the world; let's pray that He will now use the English language in the same way and help us to take advantage of this. Amen.