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Rev Robert Denham

I studied history at school. It was presented as dates, facts and figures. The only time it was not was when we studied aboriginal legends... dates drifted away in dream-time, facts did not seem to matter, and figures, well there were only a few of them in the stories anyway.

I thought that history, if it is to be believed, had to have dates, facts and figures... the economic-rationalist view of history I suppose. No room for warm fuzzies, no room for wishes, no room for holes leading to the bottom line, all had to be tallied, checked and cross-checked.

But then someone began to nibble away at my sterile view of history. History really is the study of people, their ideals, their loves and their passions. Countries and dates simply gave time and space to people who struggled with thoughts, fears and beliefs. I was shown the common person's view point of history, not the clinical view. I realised history's importance. For history is the lives and pressures of people.

And I realised that these people were loved by God. He was with them as tyrants came and went, as wars savaged, in their passions and sickness. They had beliefs, many we still see, although some come in new packaging.

As my understanding flourished, I saw how much God is interested in history. But God's interested in more than just our past. He's also interested in the future, for He knows what will happen, and how we will respond.

In Daniel 8, we have an incredible look into the future. It was a look which God gave Daniel in about 551BC, just before Babylon fell.

This glimpse of the future baffled Daniel, and made him so sick he couldn't work for a few days. It came as a dream, and showed him the times to come from 200 to 400 years in front of him. It was a "Back to the Future" experience.

His dream was of a large rampaging ram, with 2 horns, although one was bigger than the other, and a unicorn-like goat. Like a clash between 2 football teams, the ram and goat battled it out, but like a Parramatta game, it was all one-sided. The once all-conquering ram was easily defeated.

Injury took its toll, and the goat's horn snapped off, being replaced by 4, one of which was very sneaky and sinister.

The dream finished, and Gabriel interpreted it for Daniel. This dream was different to dream-time legends. This dream became history.

Daniel was living in the last days of the Babylonian reign. Soon, it would be over-run, just as we saw in Daniel 5. But the dream was set in the heart of a large Persian city.

Gabriel told Daniel, that the ram with the 2 horns was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. It would overrun and destroy everything it saw. A great and powerful nation that would destroy Babylon. It was preparing to come and reign.

But that reign would be temporary. For the coming 1 horned goat is the Gk empire, and the single horn is its "first king".

Almost 200 yrs after Daniel, in 336 BC, at the age of 20, Alexander the Great assumed command of the Greek army, and like a meteor, swept eastward over the lands that had previously been under the rule of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia. By 331BC, the whole world lay at his feet. The year before, in 332BC, he had entered Jerusalem, and shown mercy and tolerance to the Jews.

Many Jews resettled in Alexandria which became the Academic town of the region. That was where the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek many yrs later.

Alexander built Greek cities all over the world, and spread the Greek culture and language. Greek became as widespread as English is now. It became the commercial language, and most traders learnt it. But the horn was snapped off. At 33, after conquering much of India, Alexander wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. Some say he committed suicide, others say he died of a distraught spirit and disease. On his death, the Greek empire was split into 4 empires, and given to his 4 generals. So the snapped off horn was replaced by 4 horns, just as Daniel saw over 200 yrs earlier.

Palestine was ruled by General Seleucus, from Syria, but in 301BC it passed to the Egyptian based Ptolomies.

The Seleucids fought the Egyptians for Palestine, and in 198BC it came under Seleucid rule, with its king Antiochus III. Seleucus IV reigned over them for 13 years, but in 175BC with skulduggery and intrigue, the throne was grabbed by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

The Jews now entered a period of persecution not surpassed until WW2. Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to exterminate them. He devastated Jerusalem in 168BC, defiled the Temple, and offered a pig on the altar. 2 months after destroying the altar, he built an altar to Jupiter.

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He prohibited temple worship, forbade circumcision on pain of death, sold 1000s of families into slavery, destroyed all copies of the Old Testament he could find, and slaughtered everyone discovered with them.

The length of the persecution was 3 and a half years or 1,150 days, which is 2,300 mornings and evenings, just as predicted by Daniel 400 yrs before. The Maccabean revolt ended his terror, but he died, probably by disease, in another country a few years later.

That was history. Daniel's prophecy from 200-400 years before, accurately predicted it. It is so accurate that some modern scholars cannot believe it was written before the event. They claim it must have been written after it. That is usually because people don't want to think that God is powerful enough to reveal the future to His people.

But God has history in his control. This is not the only time that prophecy before the event accurately predicted the future.

There are 48 major prophecies about Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Things such as Micah said he would be born in Bethlehem; Isaiah said he would be born of a young girl, descended from Jesse, a Messenger would precede him, he would be silent before his accusers, be crucified with thieves, and be buried with the rich; Zechariah said he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, and his side would be pierced.

There are many minor prophecies and 48 major ones. They were all written down well before Jesus lived. He fulfilled them all. The probability of that occurring is 1 in 10 to the power of 157. ie 1 chance in 10 with 156 zeros after it. That is virtually impossible, yet God did it.

That is the type of God we have. He is in control of the world. He knows the future, he knows the present, He knows the past and He knows you. It is imperative that we get to know our God more and more, for He is on the awe-inspiring all-knowing side. Our future is in His hands.