

“We have the prophetic word made more sure” (2 Peter 1:19, NASB).

The Book of Daniel contains many of the key prophecies of Scripture, largely because the prophet Daniel “had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Dan. 1:17). He not only interpreted the dreams of others but also received four visions from God regarding future events. All four visions apparently occurred during the historical period covered in Daniel 1—6.

The first vision of Daniel is recorded in Daniel 7 and took place in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, about 555 B.C. The second is found in Daniel 8 and happened in the third year of Belshazzar’s reign, about 552 B.C. Vision three is found in Daniel 9 and occurred about 538 B.C. in the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede. The fourth and final vision, the last recorded event of Daniel’s life, is recorded in chapters 10 through 12 and took place in 536 B.C. in the third year of the reign of Cyrus.

Daniel 7 concludes the first major section of the book, which describes the destinies of the nations of the world. With chapter 8 we turn a corner and find the emphasis to be on the destiny of the nation of Israel.

At first glance there seems to be a remarkable similarity between the prophecies of chapters 2 and 7. Both give a panoramic sweep of Gentile world history, showing that there will be four great empires, each succeeding the other, and that history will come to its climax when God’s kingdom is established on earth and His Son reigns.

But if this is true, why should it be necessary to cover the same ground twice? The answer is found not in the similarities between the two chapters but in the differences. The vision of chapter 2 was seen by a pagan king and therefore portrayed history as man would view it, each empire having at least some intrinsic value. The vision of chapter seven, however, was given to a man of God, and to him God reveals the nations of history as they really are inwardly. They are portrayed as God sees them—wild, ferocious beasts, continually fighting and devouring one another.

Further, Daniel 7 adds important information not found in

chapter 2 about a wicked world ruler in the end times, and this information provides a foundation for the development of this personage’s character and career in subsequent visions.

It has been said that chapter 7 “provides the most comprehensive and detailed prophecy of future events to be found anywhere in the Old Testament” (Walvoord, *Daniel*, p. 145). Clearly then, this is a chapter that merits our close attention.

The Description of the Vision (7:1-14)

This first of four visions granted to Daniel came in the “first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon.” Since Nebuchadnezzar was still king in chapter 4 and Belshazzar was in his last year as king in chapter 5, it is clear that the vision occurred between the episodes of these chapters. Daniel responded by writing down an account of what he saw and heard that night.

The four beasts (vv. 2-8). In his vision, Daniel first saw a “great sea” agitated by the “four winds of heaven.” Out of this sea came successively four beasts, each different from the other. It is often suggested that the “great sea” represents the Mediterranean and that at one time or another each of the empires here described bordered on that sea. But those beasts (kings) were described as arising out of the earth (v. 17). It is better therefore to take the sea as a symbolic reference to nations (see Isa. 57:20; Rev. 17:15). The nations are here seen in perpetual turmoil and unrest, a not inaccurate picture as the annals of human history reveal. Out of the restless sea of people and nations then, four beastlike kingdoms appear. These kingdoms can be identified by references within the Scriptures and are verified by secular history. It gives us a picture of human history as God sees it, a picture that is neither appealing nor attractive.

The first beast to appear was like a lion (v. 4), symbolizing the Babylonian Empire (612-539 B.C.). This corresponds with the identification of the head of gold (2:38). The national symbol of Babylon was a winged lion and many such statues have been discovered in the ruins of that ancient city. The wings are a focus of interest, symbolizing the swiftness of the conquests of a strong and cruel kingdom. The fact that the wings were torn out, the lion

was made to stand upright like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it shows that a dramatic change came over this empire. No doubt this refers to the fact that Nebuchadnezzar, following his period of insanity and subsequent conversion to faith in Jehovah, became more humane in his manner of rule.

The second beast was like a bear (v. 5) and symbolizes the Medo-Persian Empire (539-331 B.C.), the identification of which is confirmed in Daniel 5:28, 31). It was predicted that Babylon would fall to Medo-Persia. The fact that the bear was raised up on one side indicates that Persia would gain ascendancy over Media and dominate as the superior power. The three ribs in its mouth probably symbolize Persia's conquests over Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt, carried out with its huge armies under the able direction of Cyrus. But the bear's appetite was not satisfied and she conquered more nations, devoured more empires. Persia, in fact, extended her conquests till her kingdom reached from the Indus River on the east to the land of Egypt and the Aegean Sea on the west.

The third beast to appear was like a leopard (v. 6) and symbolizes the Grecian Empire under Alexander and his successors (331-63 B.C.). This identification is confirmed in chapter 8 (vv. 20-22), and shows that Persia would be defeated by Greece. The leopard, a swift, cunning, and cruel animal with an insatiable thirst for blood, accurately symbolizes Alexander and his conquests. The four wings of the leopard denote unusual speed, a notable characteristic of the expansion of the Grecian Empire. The four heads of the beast logically and historically represent the division of Alexander's empire after his death among four of his generals.

The expression "dominion was given to it" is most interesting and significant. Did Alexander imagine that it was his military genius alone that enabled him and his small army of 35,000 men to defeat the massive hordes of the Persians numbering, some believe, in the millions? It is true that Alexander was a great leader, but his victories and subsequent dominion over a great empire were his because God, in the execution of His plans, allowed it to happen. Will world rulers ever understand this important fact?

The fourth beast to appear (v. 7) is not identified with any known animal. It has been said that no animal in the kingdom of beasts is so fierce and terrible as to portray this kingdom. The Apostle John apparently described the same beast (Rev. 13:1-10), saying it was like the leopard, bear, and lion in its features, incorporating elements from the previous empires into this one. The dominant feature of this beast and the empire it symbolized was its great and destructive strength, emphasized by several expressions in verse 7. This beast, it would appear, could only symbolize the Roman Empire, whose mighty iron legions of cruel and vindictive soldiers conquered the world of its day.

But there are more developments concerning the Roman Empire. Daniel saw that this beast representing Rome had 10 horns on its head. He observed further that another "little horn" appeared abruptly, gained strength quickly, uprooted three other horns, and then spoke boastfully (v. 8).

What can these things mean? Since this is a question Daniel himself raised and had answered in the latter part of the chapter, suffice it to say here that Daniel was describing things that are yet to be fulfilled. Despite the efforts of some interpreters to find fulfillment of these developments in history, their views have been shown to be faulty and inaccurate. The only correct interpretation must be that since there is no historical fulfillment of these things, the time is still future when the Roman Empire will reappear. Then 10 rulers will reign contemporaneously. Among them one will appear who, conquering three others, will eventually dominate the entire empire and finally become world dictator. He will be arrogant and boastful but will come to his end at the return of Christ to the earth.

The Ancient of Days (vv. 9-14). Abruptly the scene shifts from earth to heaven, from Satan's prodigy—the "little horn"—to the Ancient of Days, and from the arrogant blasphemies of Antichrist to the worship of angels before the throne of God!

The previous section of the vision has carried us to the end time, the Tribulation, to the flowering of Satan's evil genius. Now, that we may gain a heavenly perspective on these things, we are given a brief glimpse into glory to assure us that, after all, God

is in control. The same is true of the companion Book of Revelation. In Revelation 4 and 5 we are transported to heaven because we must see that God is on His throne. He is the center of the universe. He is sovereign—and it is He who will execute judgments on evil, judgments that are fully described in the Book of Revelation 6—18.

The scenes and personages of Daniel's vision are graphically portrayed. First there is the awesome vision of the Ancient of Days, no doubt God the Father. This, says one writer, is the only verse in all the Bible in which God the Father is depicted in human form (v. 9). His holiness, eternity, and glory are symbolically described. Before Him innumerable saints and angels minister and worship while books are opened and a judgment is set (v. 10).

Next the scene shifts to the one who is to be judged, the beast, or Antichrist. His body is to be "given to the burning flame," an obvious parallel to the prophecy (Rev. 19:20) which describes the beast being cast into the lake of fire.

Finally, the scene turns to the One who will carry out the sentence of judgment—"one like the Son of Man." This can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who often referred to Himself as the Son of Man and who described His second coming in the language of this verse (Matt. 24:30; 26:64). In fact, Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, seemed to make the connection between Jesus' claims and this prophecy of Daniel and reasoned that Jesus was thus claiming the prerogatives of deity and was guilty of blasphemy.

In this vision Daniel saw the Son of Man approaching the Ancient of Days (v. 13). Why does He do this? It is recorded that the Father had said to the Son, "Ask of Me and I shall give Thee the [nations] for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for Thy possession" (Ps. 2:8). Now, as the Son anticipates His return to earth, He says "Father, give Me My inheritance!" And the inheritance is granted—"And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom" (v. 14). The Son will come to judge His foes, claim His inheritance, and reign forever (see Rev. 11:15).

A missionary from Japan stated that during World War II Japanese Military Police visited Japanese churches and took the pastors and elders to court. They asked them two questions:

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ will return the second time as the Bible teaches?
2. After Jesus Christ returns, do you believe the Emperor will worship Jesus Christ or that Jesus Christ will worship the Emperor?

There can be no confusion about the answers to such questions in the light of this passage.

The Meaning of the Vision (7:15-27)

To this point there has been an objective, dispassionate report of Daniel's first great vision. Now, however, the prophet reveals his reaction to the momentous events he has seen portrayed—he is grieved and troubled. And he seeks help in understanding these things from one of the angels who stands before God's throne (v. 16; see v. 10). The help is readily given, first in summary fashion and then in greater detail.

In summary (vv. 17-18). The angel tells Daniel the four beasts represent four kings "which shall arise out of the earth." The history of the four kings and their kingdoms is considered a unit, completed only when the last empire will be destroyed. Thus, though different imagery is used, the empires described are the same as those in chapter 2—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

But ultimately, the "saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom" (v. 18). This must be the fifth kingdom, the one just granted to the Son of Man (v. 14), the kingdom He will come to establish on earth. The saints, the saved of all ages, will enter and enjoy to the full the time of Christ's reign. Their position is to be the opposite of what would be characteristic of the previous kingdoms, for then evil would dominate and evil men reign.

In 1776, American preachers, politicians, and many ordinary citizens interpreted this chapter as applying to America, particularly the promise that the "saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom" (see v. 27). Evidence seems clear that our fore-

answer but affirm that the solutions to our problems will not come by the efforts of man in any World Court, League of Nations, or United Nations. The permanent solution will come when God intervenes once again in human history by sending His Son Jesus Christ to judge and to reign on this earth.

The Effect of the Vision (7:28)

The chapter concludes with Daniel's brief statement describing his reaction to the angel's words of interpretation. Again, as at the close of the vision itself (v. 15), the prophet is troubled and deeply distressed. There is so much to grasp, and he pales at the thought of the rise of a vicious ruler who will cause great suffering among the people of God. Keeping the matter to himself, he continues to reflect on all that he has seen and heard, accepting as truth even that which he could not understand—an attitude many of us will no doubt need to adopt regarding some of the matters in this and succeeding chapters of the Book of Daniel.

We are told that among the scribes Daniel 7 was considered the greatest chapter in the Old Testament. Without question it teaches some basic and understandable things regarding God, man, and human history:

1. In the first place, though men glory in the advances and achievements of civilization through the centuries, God clearly sees human history as a chronicle of immorality, brutality, and depravity. Governments and governmental leaders may mask their true character from people for a time but they are always unmasked before God. He always knows what man really is.

2. Again, human history will not continue indefinitely on its present course, nor will it come to an end with mankind annihilating itself in some great nuclear cataclysm. Things are in God's hands, not man's, and He has by no means abdicated as Lord of this universe.

3. Finally, human history will one day see again the intervention of God. Isaiah cried out in his time, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down" (Isa. 64:1). John, in a vision, was carried forward to the second advent of Christ and recorded the answer to the prayer: "And I saw heaven

opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war" (Rev. 19:11).

Billy Graham has told of an interview with the late Konrad Adenauer, then Chancellor of West Germany. Mr. Adenauer asked Mr. Graham a series of questions:

"Do you believe Jesus Christ rose again from the dead?"

Graham replied, "Yes, sir, I do."

"Do you believe He ascended and is in heaven now?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Some say Jesus Christ will return and reign on this earth. Do you believe that?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

After a brief pause, Mr. Adenauer said, "So do I. If He doesn't, there is no hope for this world!"