

The First Vision Of Daniel

Daniel 7:1-8

Introduction

Daniel is a book about visions and dreams. In the first part Daniel interprets the visions and dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius. The first six chapters deal with narrative; the next six chapters deal with prophecy. Daniel receives a vision of four beasts (c.556 BC) in chapter 7; a vision of a ram and a goat (c.554 BC) in chapter 8; there is Daniel's prayer and the announcement of the seventy-sevens (c.538 BC) in chapter 9; a vision of conflict in the heaven's; in chapter 10:1-11:1; prophecy that relates to events regarding Greece, Egypt and Syria (c.163 BC) and the end of time—12:4-13. Chapters 2 through 7 are written in Aramaic and chapters 1; and 8-12 return to the Hebrew language. The key verse seems to be 4:17; "This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men." The key word—dream (7:1).

The book reminds us that all of the past and present and future is in God's sovereign hand. The Gentile nations are impotent in opposing God and Israel must fulfill God's destiny and plan in bringing forth God's Messiah. Has God told us everything we want to know? Perhaps not. But God has revealed all that we need to know. It would appear that the Bible's prophecies are given in such a way that we can know God's purpose in the future.

The Lord Jesus told about his arrest, torture, death and resurrection in advance. *"And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it comes to pass, you might believe"* (John 14:29).

There are critics who are quick to point out the events of chapter 7 must have been written centuries after Daniel's supposed sojourn in Babylon and Persia. They presuppose that predictive prophecy is impossible and therefore the visions and prophecies are clever stories invented after the fact. The Lord Jesus describes a time in Israel's future in Matthew chapter 24. The disciples ask Jesus "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt.24:1). Jesus in his answer gives a series of warnings and cites Daniel the prophet; "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand)". . .one translation reads "reader pay attention"(see Matthew 24:15).

How can we unlock the mysteries of Daniel and ignore the exhortation to read and understand? It would seem the subject of The Future surrounds the key players of the gentile nations, the Jewish people, the Jewish Messiah and a future antichrist figure. And so we pray with the Psalmist; "Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law" (119:18 NLT).

We will not use current events to interpret Scripture. We will use Scripture to interpret current events. We will heed Peter's warning; "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded" (1Peter 4:7).

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The First Beast: A Lion With Wings (vv.1-4)

Daniel 7:1–8 (NKJV) In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.

The last chapter ended with Daniel safely delivered from the lion's den during the reigns of King Darius and Cyrus. Now the narrative goes back in time to the reign of Belshazzar the king of Babylon. The events of Daniel 7 predate the events of chapter 6 by some 14 years prior to the fall of Babylon (about 553 B.C.). Daniel is in his mid-to late 60's.

Daniel describes a dream and visions. This is the only verse that tells us that Daniel immediately recorded the visions with the intriguing statement "telling the main facts". The dream and visions of chapters 7-8 predate the rise of the Persian Empire.

In the Old Testament God sometimes communicated through dreams and visions.

Daniel had helped kings interpret dreams and solve mysteries (see chapters 2 and 4).

In Daniel's dream there are four huge and terrifying beasts. Each of these beasts seem to represent a world empire and perhaps the empire's contribution to the unfolding of Biblical history as it pertains to God's people, and God's plans. This is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar's dream represented human history in terms of a magnificent statue made of precious metals that become debased over time. The focus is on four kingdoms. Those nations would play an important role in Israel's unfolding history leading up to the Messiah; and the final kingdom that marks the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His eternal kingdom. But Daniel's vision and dream depicts these kingdoms as blood-thirsty animals.

This portion of Daniel (chapters 7-12) is what is known as apocalyptic literature. Like the book of Revelation in the New Testament; apocalyptic literature is full of symbols and images. In order to understand and interpret the writing we must have at least some understanding of what the original author had in mind and what the original audience understood the author to mean. When we are dealing with the subject of Biblical symbolism we must also remember that a symbol can never mean what it never meant.

Also the symbol is meant to evoke or provoke a powerful emotional response. In verse 7 Daniel uses words like; terrifying, dreadful" and in verse 15 "I Daniel was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me".

2Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.

Some scholars think the Great Sea is a reference to the Mediterranean Sea.

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The four winds are often used as a reference to how God acts in providence among the people or nations of the earth (see Jeremiah 23:19;49:36; Zechariah 6:1-6 and Revelation 7:1-3). Seas often represent the people and nations (see Isaiah 17:12-13;; 57:20; Revelation17:15).

3And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

We don't have to look far to understand the meaning and significance of the four great beasts. We know they are four kingdoms that will arise from the earth (v.17). They are human kingdoms that arise from the earth (and sea). There is something distinctive about each one.

4The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

The first beast corresponds to the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great image (see 2:36-38).

The image of a lion with eagle's wings would have been familiar to Daniel and his readers. Lion's with eagle's wings adorned the walls and citadels and palaces of Babylon. The lion lost its wings and was somehow able to stand up like a man and walk like a man. Babylon still ruled the world when Daniel had his dream but in just a few years the kingdom would fall and be absorbed by the Medes and Persians as we saw in Daniel chapter 5.

It would seem the lion's wings are a type and picture of just how quickly Babylon was able to subdue the surrounding territories through the aggressive policies and conquests of Nebuchadnezzar. Some scholars suggest the reference "its wings were plucked off;" represent the insanity of Nebuchadnezzar and his subsequent recovery and conversion (Daniel chapter 4).

The Second Beast: A Bear With Ribs (v.5)

5" 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!'

The second beast resembles a bear raised up on one side with ribs in its mouth between its teeth. Voices speak. The bear like creature is instructed to arise and devour much flesh! Scholars suggest that the bear is lifted up on side because the Persians would gain the ascendancy in the Fertile Crescent coalition.

Bible scholars believe this is a description of the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Unlike Babylon the Medes and Persians brought the surrounding nations into subjugation by brute strength. The three ribs are said to represent Lydia in Anatolia conquered in 546 B.C; Babylon conquered in 539 B.C. and Egypt conquered in 525 B.C.

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The Third Beast: A Leopard With Four Wings (v.6)

6“After this I looked, and there was another, 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.

The leopard or panther is elegant, agile, powerful and cunning. Wings speak of flight. The creature represents the Greek empire under Alexander the Great (356-331 B.C.). He conquers and subdues the regions in record time (14 years).

Alexander will die young. The Greek empire will be divided to his four generals; who will rule Macedonia, Asia Minor, Assyria proper and Egypt.

But the number 4 is interesting. It is the number of the world. Again wings speak of rapid conquest.

Dominion means rule. The Greek culture and language will permeate the surrounding areas.

The Fourth Beast: Terrifying With Iron Teeth (vv.7-8)

7“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

The description is notable for several reasons. This beast is different from the others. There is a description of its head and feet but no description of its body. Daniel records “huge iron teeth” which seems reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream with the lower half of an image made of iron and then feet mixed with iron and clay. **Nebuchadnezzar’s image had ten toes and this image has ten horns.**

Scholars believe the imagery is a reference to the Roman Empire and that Empire dissolves around the 5th century AD but continued to exist in a kind of remnant form. The Roman Empire in all its incarnations has never existed in the form of ten coalitions or nations or confederacies. What part of this prophecy is past and what part is future?

Horns in the Bible speak intrinsic power, authority rule and sovereignty; kings or kingdoms. Animals use horns as weapons.

It would seem that an empire will be revived in the end-times.

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8I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

In the vision Daniel pays close attention to the ten horns. In his vision something strange occurs (the whole vision is strange). In the midst of the ten horns another horn sprouts; a little horn and this little horn either causes or witnesses' the uprooting of three of these horns. The horns are ripped off the face of the beast leaving seven horns and what Daniel calls "a little one" or the little horn.

Daniel makes a further observation. The horn has eyes like a man and a mouth speaking pompous words. Eyes speak of intelligence. The horn has a mouth. It speaks pompous words. Boastful words. What does that mean? The mouth speaks against the living God, the God of the Bible. How do we know that? Because the interpretation is provided by Daniel later in the chapter (vv.24-25). *"The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom."* Which kingdom? The final kingdom—the fourth beast. *"and another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings.²⁵ "He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time."*

What are we to make of that?

I will speak more about verses 24-25 in a future study. Those verses tell us the individual in this verse is a human being. He will subdue three kings (kingdoms). He will speak blasphemy against the God of the Bible. He will persecute the saints of the Most High God.

His blasphemous speech betrays his blasphemous character. What does blasphemous speech include? Words against the Most High. Blasphemy. The root meaning of the word blasphemy in both Hebrew and Greek includes the idea of injury either to the identity or reputation of another. The spectrum can range from a lack of reverence to utter contempt of another (see Ron Rhodes p.177; where he cites Leviticus 24:16; Matthew 26:65; Mark 2:7). *"It can also involve making claims of divinity for oneself, as the antichrist will do (compare Mark 14:64; John 10:33)."*(p.177).

This is the future antichrist. What can we glean from this text? The future antichrist emerges from a future kingdom. He comes from relative obscurity. From obscurity this creature gains great power. No one will be able to challenge or remove him from power. The political and military powers will align towards him. The eyes of a man means this person will display great intelligence, shrewdness and powers of observation. It would also seem that this individual will be unmatched in oratorical genius. He will be a master of the spoken word (see verse 20).

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Most Bible scholars anticipate his ability with words and speech will literally inspire and motivate the masses. In Revelation 13:2 he as a “lion’s mouth” (roar).

The Bible contains a great deal of information about this figure. We will have much more to say about him in the weeks ahead. It is important that you know that this figure will literally be energized by Satan himself. In the book of Revelation he is called “the great red dragon” (12:3). Some have suggested that his color comes from his bathing in the blood of the saints. Satan is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). This dragon is pictured with seven heads and ten horns and on his heads seven diadems or crowns. The descriptions given in Daniel and Revelation (13:1) describe a catastrophic control over human events in the future. It would appear that a future antichrist will control 10 regions or countries or sovereign areas with seven serving as command and control centers.

The European Union may be a prospect for this coalition. It is marked by both unity and division. Are the events around the world setting the stage for the events described in Daniel 2 and 7? Are the prophetic pieces of the puzzle coming together to launch this future man of sin? The Bible’s description of this man and the future empire sounds a bit frightening. But we have to remember; the Christian need not live in fear. “He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away” (Job 12:23). In Acts 17:26 Paul preached; “from one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries”. In Daniel 2:21 we read; “it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings” (NASB). **Now is not the time to panic. God remains firmly in absolute control.**

Are we living in the End Times? Have we come to the end—of the End of Time? Our study of Biblical prophecy and the unfolding of human history is meant to strengthen your faith and confirm your conviction that the Bible is true and trustworthy!

Conclusion

The study of prophecy is not meant to terrify the Believer but rather to purify the Believer. John speaking of the coming of Jesus said; “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Have you ever had a moment of weakness or temptation and the surprising thought came to your mind; “I don’t want to be found doing this when Christ returns.”

We live in a world crushed by sin and despair. The whole world wants peace—but what kind of peace?

Well over a thousand years ago Augustine said, “Order your soul; reduce your wants; live in charity (love manifested in deeds); associate in Christian community; obey the laws; trust in Providence.”

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Our loving Lord has planned a future for this planet and all who dwell on it. Christians who have little or no understanding of those plans will have little confidence and less hope.

It's still good advice. Order your soul. What does that mean? Put your spiritual affairs in order. Reduce wants. Live in love. Cultivate community. Be a peace maker. God's unfolding plan for the future is firmly in place.