

7. A prophetic puzzle

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Many people enjoy putting together a puzzle. It comes with a final picture that shows what the end result should be. This final picture really helps people to figure out the puzzle. But what if you are given a box of puzzle which you've never tried before and there is no final picture to refer, then you would be really puzzled.

That is how Daniel felt about the vision we are about to learn. We now have history that shows Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greek and Rome. But to Daniel, they were all present and future. In other words, Daniel didn't have the final picture to compare.

In the first six chapters of the Book of Daniel, we become acquainted with the prophet Daniel, who emerged as God's spokesman in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. The last six chapters of the Book, however, focus not on Daniel's life but on the prophetic revelations he received from God. They do give us a panoramic perspective of what God has in store for both believers and unbelievers. The vision detailed in Daniel 7 is the first of these prophecies from Daniel.

A. CHRONOLOGICALLY AND STRUCTURALLY

Daniel 7:1 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.

We know from the first verse of this chapter that the vision recorded in this chapter came to Daniel during "the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" This tells us that the vision was received around 553 B.C., when Daniel was about sixty-seven years old and still living under Babylonian rule.

The vision in Daniel 7 can be divided into three sections that each begin with the words "I saw" or "I watched". The first section is comprised of verses 2-8. This passage talks about wind, sea and odd-looking beasts. Verses 9-12 tell about thrones and judgment. The last segment, verses 13-27, relates the interpretation of the vision.

B. THE FIRST BEAST - THE LION WITH WINGS

Daniel 7:2-4 Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. 3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. 4 The 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 Hebrew word translated winds may also be rendered 'spirits', and thereby refer to 'angels'. This term is often used in Scripture in connection with God's sovereign actions in human history as carried out by angelic beings.

The 'Great Sea' is this conglomerate population of Gentiles throughout the world.

Some of you might have seen a statue of a lion with wings in photos. Babylon's winged lions can be seen the British Museum today. Jeremiah used both the lion and the eagle as pictures of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 49:19-22.

“Stand on two feet like a man” is about Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration. He became like a beast and acted like one, but his mind was restored, and he was brought back to sanity.

“A man’s heart was given to it” refers to Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion. I think he came to know the living and true God.

The four beasts of Daniel’s vision of course correspond to the four metals in the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision in chapter 2. The lion corresponds to the head of gold, Babylon.

C. THE SECOND BEAST - THE LOPSIDED BEAR

Daniel 7:5 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!’

We meet the Medo-Persian empire, not known for its swiftness, skill or majesty, but for its brute force, just like a bear.

The lopsided kingdom, the Medes initiated the kingdom, but the Persians came to dominate and eventually absorb them into their culture. The three ribs in the bear’s mouth represents the kingdoms they conquered: Egypt, Assyria and Babylon.

D. THE THIRD BEAST - THE LEOPARD WITH FOUR WINGS AND HEADS

Daniel 7:6 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.

This is certainly Greece, led by Alexander the Great, who swiftly conquered the world, defeating the Persians about 331 B.C. But the great general died in 323, and his vast kingdom was divided into four parts. Four of his leading generals each took a part of the kingdom and ruled it as the monarch.

E. THE FOURTH BEAST - THE DREADFUL AND TERRIBLE BEAST

Daniel 7:7-8 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. 8 I 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.

More attention is given to the fourth beast than to all of the other three put together. This section is very important to us because we are living in the time of the fourth beast. This horrifying and terrible looking beast with ten horns represents the Roman Empire, just as the legs of iron of Nebuchadnezzar’s image did.

The ten horns represent authorities to each 10 nations of Europe in modern days. We find the ten toes from the statue the king Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream in chapter 2. The eyes of the horn represent intelligence. It is limited with the human intelligence, not God’s.

F. THE THRONES AND JUDGEMENT

Daniel 7:9-12 "I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened. 11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

The scene shifts to heaven, and the throne of God is revealed. The Ancient of Days is obviously God, but there is debate as to if He is specifically God the Father or God the Son. Most believe it is God the Father, and the white garments and white hair stress the eternal character of God the Father. While all these ugly things are happening, Daniel witnesses true holiness and judgement.

Whether people would like to admit it or not, the the Roman Empire's influence is still strong in many countries around the world. The political system that separates executive branch and congressional branch is from Rome.

The majority of people believe that democracy is the best political system the human can have. No, it is not. The best system is theocracy that is governed by God, not by men. Democracy is the system that a majority of people put the politicians whom they think would work for them in the office. A problem is that those politicians would promise anything to get elected.

In other words, we have very little to do with the control of our government or with the choice of our president. The lobbyists and the politicians are making the choices. Once they get elected they would do whatever they want, not what we want.

"Its wheels a burning fire" speaks of the resistless energy and restless power of God in Ezekiel 1.

In v10, we find the books were opened. Which books are opened? The Bible describes several books before God.

- The book of the living - Psalm 69:28
- The book of remembrance - Malachi 3:16
- The Book of Life - Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27 and 22:19

G. THE KINGDOM OF JESUS CHRIST

Daniel 7:13-14 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will come and set up His Kingdom that will last forever. One of the best parts of that is that we get to be with Him forever.

H. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE VISION

Daniel 7:15-28 "I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. 16 I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: 17 'Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.' 19 Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; 20 and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows. 21 I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. 23 "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all other kingdoms, And shall devour the whole earth, Trample it and break it in pieces. 24 The ten horns are ten kings Who shall arise from this kingdom. 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. 26 'But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy it forever. 27 Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.' 28 "This is the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart."

After he had had visions and dreams like that, I don't think Daniel slept much that night. He probably got a better night's sleep in the den of lions than he did the night he had this dream!

V17 and 18 are the theme of this vision. No matter what kind of situation of this carnal and ungodly world runs into, God is in control.

The European Union is boasting its 50 year anniversary by this fall. 50 years ago, European countries got together to strengthen their power in the world after the devastation of the World War II. They made a treaty in Rome where the fourth beast showed his character. Europe is still very much influenced by the Vatican, Roman Catholic and it will be more influenced during the time of the Tribulation.

Currently, there are 27 countries comprise the European Union and soon Bulgaria and Romania are going to be the official member of it. You may think, "29 countries, didn't the Bible say that there would be ten countries?" Yes, it did and it will be.

I firmly believe that the EU is the one which brings the antichrist to the center stage in the future. The EU has its own executive, congressional and judiciary branches.

They have their own currency, the systems to pull all the members' industrial strength

to compete with the United States. For an example, the EU produces their own version of jet planes which used to be the territory of Boeing from America. They produce cheaper and better planes than the American counterpart due to sheer financial and material background from many countries verse one company. Boeing is losing its ground in Europe.

They even have their own military alliance: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a.k.a. NATO. Guess who helped to put together that one? The U.S. Guess who is pushed around now? The U.S. We are so smart.

Now the Euro which is the EU's currency is higher than the American dollar in 1.273 ratio. It will continue override the U.S Dollar until it becomes the world currency.

We must note two things before we close:

The antichrist

- 1) He is against Christ and a blasphemer
- 2) He attempts to imitate Christ to receive worship from people. Although he acts like a lamb, he really is a murderous monster in sheep's clothing.

The reason for the study of prophecy

The study of prophecy in this day is not for the selfish gratification of idle curiosity or vain knowledge. Rather, the careful, prayerful study of prophetic Scripture has a transforming effect upon the life of a believer.

I. APPLICATIONS

1) Since the predictions concerning the first three kingdoms have come true, we can be sure that all the details related to the fourth one will come to pass.

God will accomplish what He says He will do. Our records of the past bear this out.

2) The God who has mapped out our future is certainly able to handle the present.

Though it may seem at times that the Lord has abandoned us, He has promised He will never forsake us.

3) Although life may appear to be a confusing puzzle, it is in reality the perfect unfolding of an infallible, divine plan.

We can be comforted in the fact that God has matters under control as He seeks to prepare us for a life of glory in His Kingdom.