

September 20

Daniel 7 and 8

Whenever we encounter apocalyptic passages in the Bible -- primarily in Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew 24, Mark 13, and the Book of Revelation, look for the general overall message and don't get upset if you can't put every single piece of the puzzle together. Remember too that any prophecy in scripture presents a "perspective" problem -- from where the prophet stood his depth perception was very limited. Think of this illustration. When you travel towards a mountain range from a distance, the mountains look like a single range. But as you get closer, you see more detail. Daniel is still a long way off, describing the full view of the entire range. Focus on the big picture and other passages can fill in details.

Daniel makes some general inquiries in chapter 7 about the fourth beast -- the one he finds the most disturbing, but he does not seem to try to pin down every detail of the vision. He is content to get the main idea.

First of all, we are dealing with two separate visions which seem to have at least some overlapping features. In the first vision there were four beasts rising up out of a churning sea. Given the Babylonian creation myths which contained just such monsters rising up out of primordial chaos, it would appear that God was using images that would "make sense" to a person schooled in the culture and thought patterns of Babylon. The first beast seems the most noble. It looked like a lion with eagle wings and after its wings are torn off it stands like a man and is given a human heart.

The angelic watcher explicitly tells Daniel that each beast represents a kingdom and since there were four kingdoms in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and since the first kingdom there was Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, I feel fairly comfortable in assigning the same meaning here. It "fits" especially if the tearing off of the wings could be seen as pointing to the period of Nebuchadnezzar's madness when his pride was removed.

The second and third beasts follow, the bear and the leopard. The possibility at least exists that these represent the Medo-Persian and Greek empires -- but they are quickly passed over in favor of the fourth beast -- terrifying, frightening and very powerful which crushed, devoured and trampled all its victims.

The second part of the first vision presents an enormous contrast because Daniel saw some thrones and "the ancient of days" took his seat with clothing white as snow, hair white as wool. He is attended by 10,000 times 10,000 and there is an opening of books.

Did you ever wonder where Jesus got the title he used most frequently for himself? "Son of Man?" Well the answer is right here in Daniel! A figure like "a

son of man" is led in to the presence of the ancient of days after the fourth beast is destroyed and the Son of Man is given authority, glory and sovereign power over all peoples, nations and men of every language who worship Him. And His kingdom lasts forever.

Remember this dream of Daniel, because virtually every detail of it shows up again in the Book of Revelation. The beast is there and so are the horns. Daniel's description of God is very like John's description of the glorified Christ. There are 10,000 times 10,000 in attendance at Revelation's heavenly court and there are more books that get opened. After the defeat of the beast in Revelation, Jesus is given a kingdom that lasts forever.

That is the first vision -- when Daniel asks for an interpretation he is told that there will be four kingdoms and that the last kingdom will be "different." The ten horns are kings who come from this kingdom and the little horn is another king who will come "after" them. The saints will be handed over to him (for a time, times and half a time.) That expression shows up in Revelation too! It probably means there three and a half years. After the period of trouble the kingdoms will be handed over to the saints -- the people of the most high who will reign forever.

The "big picture" message is that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and He will reign forever" -- that is a quote from the Book of Revelation, but it is the message of Daniel's first vision.

Daniel's second vision comes in the third year of Belshazzar's reign. First he sees a ram with two horns. The angel Gabriel later tells him that is the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (the second part of Nebuchadnezzar's statute and maybe the second beast). This ram gets attacked and brutally beaten by a goat with a **horn** between the eyes. Gabriel says the goat is Greece and the horn is its first king - (that's Alexander the Great but remember Daniel is writing centuries before Alexander comes along.) The goat's horn is broken off and replaced by four horns (when Alexander died his kingdom was split into four parts). Those horns represent four lesser kingdoms. Note again that Biblical Prophecy is spot-on centuries before world events occur!

Out of one of these four horns a little horn grows in power to the south and east and toward the beautiful land. Remember Daniel is in Babylon -- the beautiful land is home -- Israel! This horn in Israel took away the daily sacrifice, brought the sanctuary low and threw truth to the ground in a "rebellion or abomination that causes desolation." Gabriel says all this will take 2300 mornings and evenings or 1,150 days and then the sanctuary will be restored. In this second vision Daniel was given a detailed picture of events from his own day, down to the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes who through cunning and deception gained control of a fourth of Alexander's empire that contained Palestine. After consolidating his power just before 170B.C. "He devoted himself to the destruction of everything the Jewish religion stood for. He killed the leaders of

the Jewish community. He profaned the temple -- sacrificing a pig on the altar. He stopped the daily sacrifices for a period of over three years -- the amount of time prophesied by the prophet Daniel.

I think that Antiochus Epiphanes was a close-up fulfillment of a long range ruler who will also gain his power by deception and cunning. Who will also employ supernatural assistance and will take his stand against the prince of princes. The repetition of all of Daniel's images in Revelation convinces me that there is more to the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies than Antiochus Epiphanes. I think that it is the near peak -- far peak phenomenon again. That fourth kingdom with a king who rises up after the others looks all the way out to the very end of the age to the final beast -- one that Paul in Thessalonians called the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist -- who will attempt to destroy the saints but will fail as the King of kings and Lord of lords returns to claim His bride and His kingdom. The angel himself tells Daniel that what he has seen deals with the distant future.

I hope it is clear to you through the pictures and images of these visions, at the last, God's son will triumph and establish a kingdom which will last forever. Now this can be a bit freaky for some... but isn't it comforting that the Bible predicts the future again and again...that it tells us what will happen in the end times... and that Jesus wins it all!

