

MARCH OF EMPIRE - LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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CHAPTER 9

Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts

LESSON TEXT -- Daniel 7:1-12

Daniel in the lion's Den an Example of Faith and Courage to All Men -- Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts, i.e., the Lion, the Bear, the Leopard, and the Nondescript Beast with Ten Horns -- The Time of These Visions -- Important Truth for All Men -- The Beasts Were Symbolic of the Four Successive World Empires -- They Represent the Divine View of Gentile World Dominion During "The Times of the Gentiles" -- The Little Horn on the Nondescript Was a Symbol of the Coming Antichrist

We have progressed in our present study to Daniel the seventh chapter. In our last lesson, based upon chapter 6, we studied chiefly concerning Daniel in the lion's den, from which story we discovered that Daniel was a man of faith and prayer and that he was delivered from the plot of the princes against him, and from the lions' den, because he believed in the Lord his GOD. The story of Daniel's deliverance was published throughout the nations by the decree of King Darius. Thus we see that besides his influence as a great statesman, Daniel's life of faith and devotion to GOD had a far-reaching influence, not only in the Gentile kingdom where he served, but, we might say, throughout the world. The story of his faith and deliverance still serves to encourage the children of GOD everywhere to trust in the Lord for deliverance in the midst of persecution, and during times of severe trials and persecutions which are hard to bear.

As we have stated before, the first six chapters of the Book of Daniel are what might be termed prophetic history because the events described therein have already been fulfilled, but the last six chapters of Daniel are prophetic in character because the events recorded therein are largely unfulfilled.

LESSON TEXT

We are now ready to begin our study of the seventh chapter, which has to do with some wonderful visions which GOD gave unto Daniel the Prophet. In verses 1 to 8 of our lesson text it says,

"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters. Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the Heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things."

THE CHANGED POSITION OF DANIEL

These words reveal, that in this chapter Daniel played a different part than in the previous chapters where he served as the interpreter of dreams and visions which had been given to others. In this chapter, Daniel was the one to whom the visions were given, and he was dependent upon those whom GOD sent to him for the interpretation of those things which he had seen.

IMPORTANT TRUTH FOR ALL GENTILES

Let us not forget that Daniel was the great prophet to the Gentiles. We may expect, therefore, that in this chapter we have information and truth which is vital to all people and nations who are living in these times, when **"the times of the Gentiles"** are rapidly drawing to a close.

WHEN THE VISIONS WERE GIVEN

The time when these visions were given to Daniel is stated in the first verse of our lesson text where it says, **"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters."**

Belshazzar, you will remember, was King of Babylon at the time it was overthrown. He was the one who made a feast to his lords; and it was to him that the handwriting appeared on the wall. Therefore it was while Daniel was still in Babylon, and during the first year of Belshazzar's reign, that the important truths of this chapter were revealed unto him.

THE VISION OF THE FOUR BEASTS

In verse 2 and 3 it says, "**Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the Heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.**"

These words are an introduction to the whole chapter, and indicate the nature of the material presented.

We must recognize that the language used in these two verses is figurative or symbolical and must be interpreted as such. Daniel said, "**I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the Heaven strove upon the great sea.**"

WHAT IS MEANT BY "THE GREAT SEA"

It is necessary for us to decide, if we can, what is meant by the expression, "**the great sea,**" as it is used in this passage. There is no doubt but what the expression has both a literal and a mystical interpretation. Literally speaking, "**the great sea**" generally refers to the Mediterranean Sea, which is so-called because it is situated geographically in the center of the earth. It is a great sea because it borders on so many large continents. It is a great sea because, around its shores the great empires of history have risen and fallen. We shall assume, therefore, that the great sea in its literal application, in this passage refers to the Mediterranean Sea.

In a mystical sense, however, the great sea refers to the great unorganized masses of mankind. Therefore, when Daniel spoke of the four winds of Heaven, as striving upon the great sea. We must keep this twofold application in mind. In a literal sense it refers to the Mediterranean Sea and in a mystical sense to the great sea of humanity, throughout the world.

THE FOUR BEASTS WERE SYMBOLIC

In the third verse Daniel said, "**And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.**"

The remaining portion of the chapter is devoted to a study and explanation of these four great beasts which Daniel saw in his vision and which came up from the sea, and were diverse one from another.

I want to say in the beginning that these four beasts which Daniel saw in his vision represent the four successive world empires which were to rise and fall during the times of the Gentiles. In other words what you have given in this chapter is a revelation of the march of empire during "**the times of the Gentiles**" represented by four beasts instead of by the metallic image which Nebuchadnezzar saw and which was interpreted for him by Daniel, as recorded in the second chapter of Daniel. The difference between the two chapters is this. King Nebuchadnezzar saw these kingdoms, and the march of empire, from a human point of view.

Consequently the image which he saw was that of a man with its head of gold, its breast and arms of silver, his belly and thighs of brass, his legs of iron, and his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thus was the outward splendor of these empires revealed to Nebuchadnezzar.

THE DIVINE VIEW OF GENTILE DOMINION

But in our lesson text Daniel was given to see and to understand these kingdoms, and the march of empire, as GOD sees them. Strange enough, they are symbolized in this chapter, not by the glorious image of a man but by wild beasts which indicate the ferocious character of Gentile civilization, as if it were the greatest that had ever existed and that it will continue, as such, to the end of time. We have forgotten what is stated in Psalm 49:12, where it says, **"Man, being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish."**

Viewed from GOD's point of view, each of the four successive world empires is justly and fittingly represented by the wild beasts named and described in Daniel's vision.

THE LION REPRESENTED BABYLON

We are now ready to take up our study of each of these four beasts, and the kingdom which they represented. The first one is mentioned in verse 4 where it says, **"The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it."**

In this passage the lion refers to, and symbolizes the great Babylonian kingdom over which Nebuchadnezzar was king, until he was succeeded by Belshazzar. The period of history, therefore, represented by this passage, corresponds to that of the head of gold of the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw.

The lion is generally spoken of as "King of beasts." Therefore, when GOD sought and purposed in his heart to choose certain beasts to symbolize the march of empire it was fitting and proper that he should choose the lion to represent the great world empire of Babylon.

Strange as it may seem the lion which Daniel saw in his vision had eagle's wings. The wings on the lion seemed to indicate that the Babylonian kingdom was able to lift itself up, as it were, above the other kingdoms over which she held dominion. The wings also may indicate swiftness of conquest.

But according to our lesson text there came a time when the wings of the Babylonian empire were plucked off, which of course, indicated a weakened condition of the empire.

Concerning the lion, as symbolizing the Babylonian empire, Daniel also said, **"It was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it."**

These words may have some reference to the humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar which he

suffered when he lifted up himself in pride and boasted of the great things which he had done. An account of his insanity, humiliation and restoration is recorded in the fourth chapter of Daniel.

Thus, my friends, we see that the lion with its wings plucked off, and which was caused to stand upon its feet as a man, was a fit symbol of the Babylonian Empire which became weak and was finally overthrown.

THE BEAR REPRESENTED MEDO-PERSIA

In verse 5 of our lesson text Daniel said, **"And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh."**

In this instance the bear was used to symbolize the Medo-Persian Empire which succeeded the Babylonian Empire in world dominion. It is spoken of as raising up on one side which indicates that the Persian side of this dual kingdom was the stronger. The three ribs which the Medo-Persian bear had in its mouth seem to indicate victories already accomplished, in her conquest for power.

Notice in our lesson text the command was for Medo-Persian Empire to arise and devour much flesh, and that is exactly what she did as confirmed by secular history. Thus we see that the period of history represented by the bear corresponds to the breast and arms of silver, in the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw.

THE LEOPARD A SYMBOL OF THE GRECIAN EMPIRE

In verse 6 of our lesson text it says, **"After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it."**

In this case the leopard was used to symbolize the world empire of Greece under Alexander. It had four wings upon its back which were used to denote its swiftness. We are also told that it had four heads. We are not surprised at this, for after the death of Alexander, the Grecian Empire was divided into four divisions and each division was given to one of Alexander's four leading generals. The divisions of the empire are given as Syria, Egypt, Macedonia and Asia-Minor.

Therefore, we must agree that a leopard with four wings and four heads was a fit symbol of the Grecian Empire.

I wish to remind you also that the period in history represented by the leopard corresponds to the belly and thighs of brass in the metallic image which Nebuchadnezzar saw.

THE NONDESCRIPT BEAST A SYMBOL OF ROMAN EMPIRE

In verse seven of our lesson text Daniel said, **"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly: and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it; and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns."**

Indeed, my friends, here you have a description of a nondescript beast. This was not an actual beast, but it was a figurative beast, used to describe the fourth world empire which was Rome. Perhaps the reason no living beast was chosen to symbolize the Roman Empire was because no beast living was adequate to symbolize the fierceness and the strength and the cruelty of the Roman Empire. Therefore, a nondescript beast was provided for our imagination to symbolize the cruelest and most heartless of world empires.

Not only was this fourth beast dreadful and terrible and strong, and not only did it devour and break in pieces and stamp the residue with its feet, but it was diverse from all the beasts before it, and it is described as having ten horns.

This fact is significant in the light of what is stated in the eighth verse of our lesson text where it says, **"I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things."**

These words indicate that the Roman Empire, symbolized by the nondescript beast which had ten horns was to continue on through to the end of Gentile world dominion. This period of history, therefore, corresponds to the legs of iron and the feet of the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw which were part of iron and part of clay. The ten horns of the nondescript beast, therefore, correspond to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image. We have every reason, therefore, to expect that the Roman Empire will be revived during the last days of the present dispensation, and that it will be, in its revived form, ruled over by ten kings.

THE LITTLE HORN SYMBOLIC OF THE ANTICHRIST

The most interesting thing, however, in our lesson is the mention made there, in the eighth verse, to the little horn. In the eighth verse Daniel said, "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaketh great things."

Indeed, my friends, couched in this strange language you have a prophetic introduction to none other than the coming Antichrist, who is here called "The little horn." According to our lesson text he will arise and subdue three of the first horns, or Kingdoms so that only he and seven of the kings, (represented by the ten horns,) will remain. We know that the little horn, well represents, the coming Antichrist because it says, **"In this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things."**

The title of "**little horn**" is only one of several different titles given to the Antichrist in the Word of GOD.

- Not only is he called the "**little horn**," but
- he is spoken of in the scriptures also as "**The king of Babylon**,"
- in Isaiah 14:4, "**the Assyrian**,"
- in Daniel 9:26 he is spoken of as "**the prince**."
- In Daniel 8:23 as "**the willful king**."
- In II Thessalonians 2:3 he is called "**the son of perdition**,"
- and "**the lawless one**."
- And in Revelation 13:1 he is called the "**beast**."

Thus, my friends, you see the importance of that dreadful personality which is introduced to us in Daniel 7:8 as the "**little horn**."

A VISION OF THE COMING OF CHRIST

We now come to a very interesting part of our chapter in verses 9 to 12 where Daniel said,

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time."

In brief, my friends, what we have here is a vision of the coming of the Son of man in glory. We can not enlarge upon this passage as we would like to do in our lesson but suffice it to say that these words reveal the end and the doom of the Antichrist or beast, symbolized by the little horn, in our lesson text. This passage also reveals that the kings who will be associated with him will have their dominion taken away from them. These words introduce to us, therefore, the person and the works of the coming Antichrist, which will merit a more careful study in our future lessons.

~ end of chapter 9 ~
