

Daniel's Vision of Chapter Seven II

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Last week we began our study of chapter seven of Daniel, the vision of the wild beasts. We noted some principles that apply to these visions, including the usage of symbols in prophecy, the presentation of visions in parallel format, how the visions "build" on one another and the importance of yielding our wills in obedience to Him in order to gain true understanding of the messages of prophecy. Those of you who work with computers know the importance of the "apply" button. Knowledge without application becomes a curse. Light that is not followed becomes darkness.

Understanding the truth of God's messages means

- We have a grasp of how prophecy was fulfilled in history because faith in the Scriptures grows when we see that the Book is reliable. All these things came to pass just as God predicted.
- It means that we are able to ascertain the trends of the future, because God wants us to know where all this is going.
- But most importantly, it leads to holy living. It leads to changed lives. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." II Peter 3:11, KJV.

"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. Daniel spoke, saying, 'I saw in my vision by night, and behold the four winds of heaven

were *stirring up* the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

“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.

“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!”

“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.

“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.

“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.” Daniel 7:1-8.

Last week we looked at the “stirrings on the sea,” the “four winds” representing the energy and activity both of God’s Spirit and the enterprises of man, which resulted in the formation of nations and kingdoms. Going from Daniel’s day forward, the first to emerge from amidst the “sea” of humanity was the lion, having eagle’s wings. This represents the kingdom of Babylon, which is modern Iraq. Babylon was the head of gold in the statue dream of chapter two; it is the tawny lion of chapter seven. The wings symbolize the swiftness with which Babylon became a world-dominating power.

His angel companion explained to Daniel, "Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth." Daniel 7:17. But notice very carefully that each beast is not limited to the reign of one single person, because concerning the fourth beast the angel says, "The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth." Daniel 7:23. The lion didn't just represent Nebuchadnezzar, but the kingdom of Babylon under all her monarchs. This is a very important principle to understand as we go.

The picture of a winged lion was most appropriate as a pictogram of Babylon. It was their national symbol. In their religion and culture the winged lion stood for their chief deity Marduk. There were many sculptures picturing lions with wings decorating the Babylon of Daniel's day.

There had been previous manifestations of "Babylon." There was a "Babylon" that existed about the time of Abraham, of which the famed Hammurabi was king. We might go back further and say that the first "Babylon" culminated in the ill-fated tower of Babel. (The words "Babel" and "Babylon" have linguistic association.) Following the Flood, man distrusted God's promise that there would never again be a world-wide deluge, and in defiance he built a tower that would reach to the sky. God interrupted their building project by confusing their language.

It is interesting that later, Nebuchadnezzar, in what historians call "neo-Babylon" built a city dedicated to the memory of the tower of Babel which came to be known as Borsippa, which means literally "tongue tower."

That "neo-Babylon" developed into a world ranking kingdom so quickly was a matter of curiosity as well as prophecy. Habbakuk struggled with questions relating to the spiritual decline of Judah. The Lord answered him by saying, "Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were

told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs." Habakkuk 1:5, 6. The Lord would render the discipline of captivity toward Judah in an attempt to correct their sins and woo them back to Him. This, He said, would be brought about by the kingdom of Babylon.

Habakkuk wrote his prophecy in 630 B. C., at a time when it would have been surprising to suggest that Babylon would rise to such a position of prominence in such a short time. It would be like today predicting that Bolivia or the Philipians, for example, would rule the world in a couple of decades. But just 25 years after Habakkuk's vision, Babylon would indeed rise and swallow up nations, including Judah and Nebuchadnezzar would be the most powerful man on earth. Nebopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, had taken the throne in 626 B. C. and welded a loosely knit political structure into a formidable and dominant power. When he passed away, his son took the throne. Babylon ruled from 605 B. C. through 539 B. C.

Throughout the Scriptures, as noted in this passage, God is seen at work in the rise and fall of nations. Keep in mind the four themes of the book of Daniel: God knows, cares, is involved and rewards. His involvement in the rise and fall of nations is the subject of many texts in the Bible. "I am raising up the Chaldeans." Daniel opens his book by saying "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar's) hand." Daniel 1:2. The Lord had His purpose in doing this. As strange as it might seem, Babylon was going to bring about His plan in bringing discipline to His people. He even calls Nebuchadnezzar "My servant." Jeremiah 25:9.

An opportunity was given to Babylon, to see whether it would consent to abide by God's counsel, or whether it would persist in following its own agenda. Ultimately, although as an individual King Nebuchadnezzar eventually gave his heart to the Lord, the kingdom, represented by the blasphemous Belshazzar, hardened her heart in obstinacy against His will.

This same principle applies to individuals as well as kingdoms. God gives to each of us opportunities, represented in talents, time, influence and wealth. What will we do with these gifts? Will we acknowledge Him as the Giver and Supplier of all? Will we use these benefits to further His kingdom? Or, will we like Nebuchadnezzar did at first, and Belshazzar did to the end, refuse to acknowledge Him and turn the blessings He has given to us into a curse by spending them entirely on ourselves and our plans? That is the basic question of life.

In Habakkuk's prophecy, after describing the powerful onslaughts of Babylon, he wrote, "Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, imputing this power to his god." Habakkuk 1:11. An allotted time was accorded the nation of Babylon, and when it was evident that she would not yield her spirit to obedience, her day of glory and grace faded, and another took her place. It was God's purpose that she remain in a favored condition. He did not predestinate them to destruction. Salvation and blessing are always His goal. "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed." Jeremiah 51:9.

This regal lion in Daniel's vision, the king of beasts, is pictured as having its wings removed and standing on its feet like a man, with a man's heart being given to it. What does that mean? From her position of strength and power, Babylon declined to a stature of weakness. The wings on the lion that are removed describe Babylon's incapacity to be successful in her accomplishments as she once was. In Habakkuk's prophecy, of Babylon it is said, "They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat." Habakkuk 1:8. In her earlier years, the symbol of flight was an accurate description of her prowess and skill. But then, her "wings" would be "plucked off."

Originally, serpents had wings and could fly, but after the curse of sin, snakes had to crawl on the ground. They lost their wings. Sin debilitates and cripples. It doesn't lift you up; it brings you down. A lion standing on its feet as a man and having a

man's heart describes its loss of courage and fortitude. A man who has a "lion's heart," as a certain English king was once described as having, is a picture of bravery. You've heard of Richard the lion-hearted. A lion with a man's heart is a picture of cowardice. So Babylon, through pride and disobedience fell from her lofty perch.

In the dream of Daniel two, we saw how the metals in the statue declined in value. It went from gold, silver, bronze, iron to mud. Sin tends toward a decline in moral worth, as illustrated in the metals of chapter two, and a decline in moral strength as illustrated in the wingless lion with a man's heart in chapter seven.

This is a lesson of life, applying both to kingdoms and individuals. God gives to us blessings and gifts. If they are misused or abused, we lose those abilities. "How art thou fallen from heaven?" describes Lucifer's tragic decline. "How art thou fallen?" describes Samson's disastrous loss of strength. Babylon's fall was as surprising and shocking as was her rise. "Oh, how Sheshach (a code word for Babylon) is taken! Oh, how the praise of the whole earth is seized! How Babylon has become desolate among the nations! The sea has come up over Babylon; she is covered with the multitude of its waves. Her cities are a desolation, a dry land and a wilderness, a land where no one dwells, through which no son of man passes. I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out of his mouth what he has swallowed; (the nation of Judah symbolized by a "piece of candy" in verse 34) and the nations shall not stream to him anymore. Yes, the wall of Babylon shall fall." Jeremiah 51:41-44.

All of this came true. Look up pictures of what ancient Babylon looks like today and you'll see desolate sand dunes and mounds of ruins. Translate that principle to the modern monuments of man's achievements, and you will know that the glory of Olympic Beijing, the splendor of Dubai and all the other accomplishments brought about by the hand of man will one day likewise end up as did ancient Babylon. Because of this, God uses

Babylon as a token of all those who follow in her footsteps. The book of Revelation makes ample usage of the history of the fall of Babylon, taking generously from passages such as Jeremiah 50 and 51 to describe the eventual fall of all those who persist in disobedience.

The “stirrings on the sea” brought forth another to take Babylon’s place. “The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” II Chronicles 36:22. The biblical Persia is what we would call Iran today. The story of how Cyrus accomplished the defeat of Babylon, and how Scripture uses that as a depiction of the mission of Jesus is one of the most challenging and fruitful in all the Bible. We’ll save that for another time. Under the symbol of a bear, the coalition government of the Medes and Persians strode upon the stage of world leadership. Much has been speculated as to the identity of the “three ribs” she held in her mouth. Some Bible students have seen kingdoms and territories such as Babylon, Egypt and Libya represented by the ribs.

From 539 B.C. to 331 B.C. Persia was the dominant force. She is the chest and twin shoulders of silver of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Nothing is said in chapter two concerning which of the two parts would be dominant, but in accordance with the principle that later prophecies add more details, now we see this bear “raised up on one side,” representing the dominance of the Persian faction. In chapter eight we’re told specifically that the “higher” rose up “later.” During these years the Jewish return from captivity and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, its temple and walls, was sponsored. The ministries of Haggai, Ezra, Zechariah and Malachi flourished. During these years the touching story of Esther took place. Eventually, Persia outlived her day of opportunity and another came swiftly to take her place.

If the *two* wings on the lion of Babylon represented the swiftness of her rise, consider the rapidity of Greece’s growth represented by the *four* wings seen on the leopard, the waist of bronze in the statue dream. Greece had been a disunified

grouping of city states. But when Philip of Macedon took the reins, he was successful in bringing them together into a whole, the sum of which was greater than its parts. Together, these "united states" began a march of aggression and conquering that was unstoppable.

Philip had a son named Alexander, who showed outstanding ambition and skill at an early in life. As a teen, it is reported that he was disappointed when his father would come home from his successful exploits, fearing that there would be nothing left to overcome when he came of age.

Following his father's death, Alexander became king and called himself Alexander the Great. He became ruler of what became a vast empire stretching from Europe to India. Alexander cherished the dream of rebuilding Babylon and making it his capital, but succumbed to death near Babylon at the early age of 33, some say because of a drinking binge, others think it was due to malaria. Whatever the cause, what a contrast between the Macedonian conqueror and the humble Christ! Both died at 33, but what a difference! One lived for himself, the Other lived to please God. The mighty power of the Greek empire came to an end, but Christ's kingdom is everlasting.

Nevertheless, the imprint of Greek culture in arts, mathematics, philosophy and language made a deep impression on the world for centuries to come. Though Christ's death would be about 200 years after Greece fell to Rome in 168 B. C., the language of the Greeks was still a predominate factor in world affairs.

- When Pilate inscribed the sign that would be nailed to the cross, it would be in Latin, Hebrew and Greek.
- The New Testament was originally written in Greek.
- One of the cradles of Jewish culture was in the city of Alexandria, named of course after Alexander, in Egypt which retained a strong Greek influence.

- It was there in the second century B. C. that the Old Testament was translated into Greek by a team of 70 (hence it was known as the "Septuagint" and abbreviated as "LXX"), and became the preferred Bible translation for New Testament authors.

After Alexander's death the kingdom was divided into four parts and given to his four generals, symbolized by the four heads of the leopard. We'll discuss this in a little more detail when we come to chapter eight. The waist of bronze was to be replaced by the iron legs of Rome. The leopard was to be replaced by a dreadful beast that defied description.

In the year 168 B. C. Rome delivered a crushing blow which defeated the forces of Greece for the second time, and in 146 B. C. the Roman consul Lucius Mummius razed the Greek city of Corinth, indicating the end of Greek rule. For the next six centuries, about a tithe of earth's history, Rome would dominate. It would be under her authority that Jesus the Christ would be born. It was under Roman authority that He died. A Roman seal was placed on His tomb. Roman Caesars persecuted Christians in the first few centuries.

But like the others which had paraded across the stage of time before her, Rome also would see her power decline. There would, however, be a difference this time. Rather than being replaced by another civil kingdom as a world dominating power, Rome would see her kingdom divided among what would become the nations of modern Europe. The feet of the statue in chapter two, including its ten toes would follow the legs of iron. The iron toothed dragon of chapter seven would give its power to ten horns. Invading European tribes would sweep down upon her bringing division and destruction. The Swiss, Anglo-Saxons, French, and German nations would emerge from the disintegration of Rome's former empire.

After this would come, according to Daniel's vision, the introduction of another power; a horn, or power, which would

begin small, yet be proud and pompous; a horn with eyes and a mouth speaking blasphemous words. The discussion of this power will be the subject of next week's study.

Bible students have long recognized the fulfillment of the features of Daniel's prophecies. Hippolytus, who died in 236 A. D., was bishop of Portus Romanus, a harbor which was about 15 miles from Rome. He was a voluminous author and commented on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Listen to what he wrote 18 centuries ago concerning Daniel 7.

"In speaking of a 'lioness from the sea,' he (Daniel) meant the rising of the kingdom of Babylon, and that this was the 'golden head of the image.'... Then after the lioness he sees a second beast, 'like a bear,' which signified the Persians. For after the Babylonians the Persians obtained the power. And in saying that 'it had three ribs in its mouth,' he pointed to the three nations, Persians, Medes, and Babylonians, which were expressed in the image by the silver after the gold. Then comes the third beast, 'a leopard,' which means the Greeks; for after the Persians, Alexander of Macedon had the power, when Darius was overthrown, which was also indicated by the brass in the image. And in saying that the beast 'had four wings of a fowl, and four heads,' he showed most clearly how the kingdom of Alexander was parted into four divisions. For in speaking of four heads, he meant the four kings that arose out of it. For Alexander, when dying, divided his kingdom into four parts. Then he says, 'The fourth beast (was) dreadful and terrible: it had iron teeth, and claws of brass.' Who, then, are meant by this but the Romans, whose kingdom, the kingdom that still stand, is expressed by the iron? 'for,' says he, 'its legs are of iron.'" Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. V, chapter 1, p. 178.

Notice how clearly this early expositor saw the parallel between chapter two and chapter seven. "Let us look at what is before us more carefully, and scan it, as it were with open eye. The 'golden head of the image' is identical with the 'lioness,' by which the Babylonians were represented. 'The golden shoulders

and arms of silver' are the same with the 'bear,' by which the Persians and Medes are meant. 'The belly and thighs of brass' are the 'leopard,' by which the Greeks who ruled from Alexander onwards are intended. The 'legs of iron' are the 'dreadful and terrible beast,' by which the Romans who hold the empire now are meant. The 'toes of clay and iron' are the 'ten horns' which are to be. The 'one other little horn spring up in their midst' is the 'antichrist.' The stone that 'smites the image and breaks it in pieces,' and that filled the whole earth, is Christ, who comes from heaven and brings judgment on the world." *Ibid.*, chapter three pp. 178, 179.

After the vision had been given, the prophet confessed, "I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me." Daniel 7:15. The angel companion was quick to respond to Daniel's concern. "Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." Daniel 7:17, 18.

The angel wanted to make sure that Daniel understood the final outcome. He skipped to the end of the book and read the final chapter to let Daniel know it was going to come out okay.

Today our fragile world is rocked by one event after another. Earthquakes, fires, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes seem to be in the news every day. Concerns over the Middle East, concerns over southern Europe compete for front page attention. Economic collapse is a distinct possibility. Today Jesus wants you to know that the saints will possess the kingdom! Jesus wants you to know that if you "trust and obey" Him, the future is glorious! Jesus wants you to know that "In a little while, we're going home."

I'm Thinking Of That City

I'm thinking of that City where the shadows never come
That City of light, that never needs the sun

Oh, Jesus take us home to bow before Your throne
In that City, in that City, where the shadows never come
His kingdom is coming soon we're told

We'll walk those shining streets of gold
Oh, keep us in Your arms till we're free from all harm
In that City, in that City, where shadows never come

I'm thinking of that City where sorrows flee away
The City of light, where peace reigns every day
Oh, Jesus hear our prayer and take us safely there
To that city, to that City, where sorrows flee away
To that city, to that City, where sorrows flee away

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