

Daniel's Vision Of Chapter 7 I

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

August 9, 2009

**This sermon is available in audio format on our audio sermons page for download or listening*

Today we worship the God of heaven, the One Who made everything; the One Who knows the end from the beginning. He has graciously given us clear evidence of His omniscience in the prophecies of the Bible. Fulfilled prophecy is a great reason to believe the Bible is His divine Book, and nowhere does this evidence shine brighter than in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

He loves each of us dearly, as if we individually were His only child. His plan ensures the salvation and restoration of everyone and anyone who will say "Yes" to Him. Our study takes us to chapter 7, the great vision of the wild beasts. In chapter six, Daniel the prophet was subjected to the den of beasts. In chapter seven, the church is subjected to onslaught of wild beasts.

"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.

“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; 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.

“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.

“As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

“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. 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.” Daniel 7:1-14.

With these words, Daniel shares with us the “main facts” of the first vision he received, given in the first year of Belshazzar’s reign. Since we’ve already discussed the fascinating story of the relatively recent discovery of Belshazzar’s name in documents outside the Bible, we won’t cover that ground again. But we will take this opportunity to review some very important principles relating to the understanding of prophecy in the Bible, particularly prophecy which is conveyed through the use of symbols. We’ll consider:

- The purpose of symbols in prophecy
- The concept of “parallel prophecies”
- The phenomenon of “building” in prophetic revelation
- The requirements for obtaining wisdom to understand

Why did God use symbols in prophecy? For a couple of reasons.

First, as the saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Pictures arrest and compel our attention. A picture engages the visual component of our brains and increases the chances that the concept will be remembered. Today we’re used to seeing countries and political parties represented by animals as symbols. We’re familiar with a bald eagle standing for the United States; a bear picturing Russia or California, for example. The beasts of prophecy are the “political cartoons” of Scripture. Symbolic pictures like the ones given to Daniel and John grip our curiosity and increase our “learning readiness.” Our thoughts are challenged by the dramatic representations, and our minds search for meaning.

Yes, God could have just stated the facts of prophecy, “The kingdom of Babylon will be followed by the empire of the Medes

and Persians," but He packaged the information in wrappings that would arouse our interest. Moses was shepherding one day when his curiosity was engaged by a bush that was burning, but did not burn up. God uses our natural curiosity to stimulate our thinking. Who cannot remember seeing drawings, paintings, or even three dimensional replicas of these beasts of Daniel and Revelation and looking with awe and wonder? Jesus taught through the use of parables for the same reason.

Secondly, placing the information in a "coded" form would ensure that the *diligent* student would be able to learn, but the casual onlooker would miss out. "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with *all your heart*," is a principle that applies to the prophetic symbols. Jeremiah 29:13. We'll talk more about that in a minute.

Let's review the concept of parallel prophecies. Remember that Joseph received as a youth two dreams, both of which were prophetic. In one dream he and his brothers were harvesting grain, and the sheaves of his brothers bowed down to his sheaf. In another dream, the sun, moon and stars paid homage to him. Both of these dreams said the same thing, that one day, through God's providence and despite Satan's efforts, Joseph would be prime minister of Egypt and his brothers and father would indeed bow before his feet. They were parallel prophecies.

While Joseph was in Egypt, Pharaoh dreamed two dreams, one about grain, and another about cows. They were parallel prophecies. In each case, the skinny ones ate up the fat ones, but still remained skinny. Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams as "one." Though the symbols were different, the message was the same, and by paying heed to the prophecy given, Egypt was spared from famine.

Likewise, the prophecies of Daniel (and of Revelation) are parallel. Each of the outline prophecies of Daniel covers the same basic period of time, but is given with different symbols. We will find that the "head of gold" in Daniel 2 is a tawny lion in Daniel 7.

Both represent the kingdom of Babylon. We will be able to “line up” the various components of each of the visions and make comparisons.

When we do that, we will see that each vision “builds” on the foundation laid by previous revelations. The “skeletal” information given in the statue dream of chapter two is embellished by further visions. Many times what comes later is not just more information, but it is of a more complex character. “Tissue” and “muscle” are added to the “bones” as God reveals further details. That’s why it’s important to get a solid footing at the beginning, because the “framework” will remain the same. You can’t study calculus until you’ve mastered basic arithmetic.

As part of that analysis, we’ll see that the prophecies of Daniel (and Revelation) all have a common ending point. They each bring us to the “end.” More specifically, they all focus on the “judgment.” We find this in common with not only the prophecies, but also the stories of Daniel.

- Chapter 1 concludes with the examination of Daniel and his friends following their schooling.
- Chapter 2 portrays the Stone cut out without hands which brings God’s judgment when it smites the image’s feet.
- Chapter 3 features the trial by fire for Daniel’s friends, from which they emerge harmless and whole.
- Chapter 4 tells the story of the Holy Watcher Who pronounced judgment against Nebuchadnezzar’s pride.
- Chapter 5 relates the final judgment of Belshazzar who was “weighed” and “found wanting.”
- Chapter 6 tells us how Daniel’s life was examined by his enemies to find some fault or error.
- We’ll see that chapter 7 and the following visions likewise have the final judgment as a terminus.

Now we come to the most important consideration. How do we obtain wisdom to understand what is given in these prophecies? There is extreme danger in misinterpreting the symbols and

coming to wrong conclusions. Symbols, by definition, require explanation. We want to make sure that the explanations we arrive at are correct.

The basic principle is that the prophetic clues can be understood through diligent and careful study, comparing Scripture with Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit *and* yielding our wills to Him.

Notice one of the differences between the vision of chapter 7 and the dream in chapter 2. The former was given to a heathen monarch, the "non-believer" and concerned itself primarily with political events. We might call the statue dream of chapter 2 the "march of the monarchies." Kingdom would follow kingdom. These are basic facts which could and should impress even the non-spiritual person. But the vision of chapter 7 is given to the "believer" Daniel. It wasn't given to Belshazzar. This vision has to do with not merely world events, but those events as they impact the church. The wider scope of events, as they impinge on God's people, is open to the one who is in tune with spiritual matters. With respect to prophecy, you can "paddle around" at the shore's edge gleaning a few facts, or you can launch out into the deep and gather hidden gems of truth available to the sincere seeker.

Jesus related His messages to crowds that lined the hillsides of Galilee, but He reserved His explanations for His disciples. The parables fell upon the ears of thousands; the clarifications of those parables He gave only to a select few. "His disciples asked Him, saying, 'What does this parable mean?' And He said, 'To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that "Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand."'" Luke 8:10.

Today, those who follow Him closest will receive the clearest light. Understanding the truth of the prophecies is not so much a matter of innate intelligence or I. Q.; it is more a matter of humility and surrender. Who had a better grip on the principles of God's kingdom back in Jesus' day? The learned professors who

had spent years in the rabbinical schools and had memorized chapters of Scripture, even carried around portions of the Bible on their forearms and foreheads, but whose minds were locked up in pride, or the humble fishermen who learned at Jesus' feet?

Jesus said to them "To *you* it is given to know," while the ones who thought they knew it all were passed by. On the road to Damascus Paul heard a Voice which changed his life. Those who accompanied him saw the light, but did not hear the Voice, at least in an intelligible way. They only heard a "sound," (the Greek word *phonee* in Acts 9:7 can be translated "voice" or "sound") and what they heard they could not understand. "Understanding" on the Damascus Road was a gift reserved for the one God knew would appreciate and apply it.

In all the previous revelations in Daniel, man's attempts to understand the divine were futile. Every time the astrologers, soothsayers and wise men were called, they were not successful in interpreting God's message. Even when the "writing" was "on the wall," they had to wait for Heaven's man to come and untangle the enigma of its mysteries. Wisdom to understand the prophecies correctly comes from God, and those who attempt to gain understanding of its content without heavenly guidance will not achieve their goal.

What are we told with respect to how prophecy came about? "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved *by the Holy Spirit.*" II Peter 1:21. The Holy Spirit is the One Who inspired the minds of men through dreams, visions or impressions to write out the messages they were given. To obtain understanding in these things, our minds must be guided by the same Spirit. "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." I Corinthians 2:14.

When Peter gave his confession that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah, Jesus responded, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar

Jonah, for flesh and blood (mortal man) has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven." Matthew 16:17. Many were the prophetic pundits of Jesus' day who missed the most emphatic fulfillment of all, that of the coming of the Christ. They missed it! The "Voice" was speaking, but they only heard a "sound." He was right before their eyes, a living fulfillment of the Old Testament's prophecies, yet their eyes were dimmed because they had not opened their hearts to God. The spiritual eye salve of the Holy Spirit was lacking, and they walked in darkness. Understanding the terms and message of prophecy involves a commitment to God and His ways.

Whom does God bless with His Spirit of wisdom? Peter said to the council, "We are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit Whom God has given to those who obey Him." Acts 5:32. Think of the context of that scene! There were the intelligent leaders, skilled and trained in the Scriptures, lawyers and scribes, yet devoid of understanding. And there was Peter, who probably never sat at a pupil's desk, but who was gifted with a profound grasp of God's plan as revealed in prophecy. What made the difference? How was it that the fisherman was smarter than the professors? It was Peter's surrender to God and obedience to His will.

Those today who strive to reach understanding and wisdom, yet fail to obey the Lord's Commandments are likewise making a serious mistake. Their interpretations will not stand the test of time. "The fear (reverence, respect and obedience) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." If I am walking in a way that is out of harmony with His precepts, how can I expect that He will bless my mind with understanding? "If any man will do His will, he shall know the doctrine..." John 7:17 KJV. Obedience is a pre-requisite to obtaining wisdom. More important than "knowledge" is a life-giving connection with Jesus! It's not what we know, it's Who we know!

With those thoughts in mind, let us turn our attention to the text of Daniel 7. There is an abundance of material available on

this chapter. Bookshelves worth of commentary have been written on this one chapter. We will confine ourselves to the “main facts” of the vision.

Daniel saw in his vision “the four winds of heaven” stirring up the Great Sea, out of which four great beasts emerged, different from one another.

Let’s first consider what the term “wind” signifies in prophecy. Many of us would be quick to answer, “That’s military conflict; the battles that birthed nations. You know, the ‘winds of war.’” Well, that’s true, but let’s take a closer look. The word “wind” is the word *ruach* in Aramaic, equivalent to the Hebrew word *ruach*. It can mean

- “Air” or “wind” Jeremiah 2:24
- “Breath” Job 19:17
- Human “spirit” Psalm 32:2
- Divine “Spirit” Psalm 51:12

When used in prophecy, it means “energy” or “activity.”

- As God was about to exercise His creative power upon the earth, God’s Spirit (*ruach*) hovered above the waters. Genesis 1:2.
- After the Flood, God sent a mighty wind to dry up the land and cover the corpses. Genesis 8:1.
- In vision Ezekiel saw the revival of the dry bones when God’s Spirit came upon them. Ezekiel 37:9, 10, 14.
- On the day of Pentecost, the sound of a mighty rushing wind was heard as God’s Spirit empowered His people. Acts 2:2.

In the Old Testament, the word *ruach* is used more than 50 times referring to the Holy Spirit. We would make a serious error if we saw the word *ruach* in this verse and didn’t include the role of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, there are numerous references to human agencies being represented by “winds.”

- Speaking of the advances of Babylon’s armies, we read, “A dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people—not to fan or to cleanse—a wind too strong for these will come for Me; now I will also speak judgment against them.’ Behold, he shall come up like clouds, and his chariots like a whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered.” Jeremiah 4:11-13.

The later destruction of Babylon was likewise expressed by the metaphor of wind: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold I will raise up against Babylon, against those who dwell in Leb Kamai, a destroying wind. And I will send winnowers to Babylon, who shall winnow her and empty her land. For in the day of doom they shall be against her all around. Against her let the archer bend his bow, and lift himself up against her in his armor.’” Jeremiah 51:1-3.

The “winds” of Daniel’s vision represent those activities and movements which shaped the nations and empires. These “stirrings” were the combination of God’s involvement and human endeavors. Remember that we’re told specifically that it is God Who puts up kings and sets up kingdoms. In this very book of Daniel we read, “The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.” Daniel 4:17. The second verse of the book declares, “The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar’s) hand.” Daniel 1:2.

Notice how the Bible describes God’s involvement in the activities of man. Notice particularly the word “stirred” and remember that in Daniel’s vision he witnessed the four winds “stirring up” the Great Sea. In these verses we have examples given of His Spirit at work among the nations.

- “The God of Israel *stirred up* the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh into captivity.” I Chronicles 5:26.
- “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD *stirred up* the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” II Chronicles 36:22.

Man may think that the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms is exclusively of human origin, but the Bible reveals differently. A correct understanding of this view of history is vital! The book of Daniel tells us clearly that the God of the universe is involved in the affairs of men.

This is not to make God responsible for the misdeeds and abuses of human governments. In the case of Babylon, the Lord had His purpose in allowing it to gain the power and position it did. He allowed the rise of this kingdom to render discipline on Judah, which had departed from the path of righteousness. But He did not condone the excessive, relentless, cruel and proud way in which Babylon went about her business. The Lord expressed His disapproval of the way Babylon broke the bones of His sheep Israel and swallowed her up like a piece of candy. Jeremiah 50:17, 34.

She was the Lord’s tool to accomplish His purpose, and opportunity was given to her to remain in His favor by acknowledging Him and conforming to His will. Look at this “strange” passage: “Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,” says the LORD, “and *Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant*, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them.” Jeremiah 25:9.

When at last she refused to respect Him, epitomized by the attitude and behavior of Belshazzar, her day of probation and opportunity passed, and another was given the scepter.

So when we see the word "wind" in Daniel 7:2 keep in mind that it represents the activity and energy of both God's Spirit, as well as those military enterprises of human engineering. Together, this "stirring up" accomplished the formation of nations and kingdoms. The number "four" doubtless expresses the world-wide influence of these uprisings, as in the term "four corners of the earth," or like we'd refer to the "four points of the compass."

These "winds" strove upon the waters of the "Great Sea." There is no need to specifically identify which body of water Daniel saw in vision; this body of water represents the "great sea" of humanity. "The waters which you saw...are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues." Revelation 17:15. So in this prophetic drama, the energy of the divine and human combined to work upon and within the masses to mold governments and political powers.

The first to come forth was a winged lion. This is not to say that Babylon was the "first" empire to rule. There had been Egypt and Assyria before. But the prophetic message took Daniel from his day down through history. It begins "now." There is an encouraging thought in that manner of presentation. The Gospel is taught in this prophecy. God wants to begin with us "today." He's willing to forgive and forget the past and start new. He's willing to send His divine energy, His Spirit, on the "great sea," the masses of humanity in general, and upon you individually, to start life anew.

Just as His Spirit hovered above the waters in Genesis, the book of beginnings, He will come into your life and bring order from chaos. Today can be the first day of eternal life if you accept Jesus and give Him your life. His plan for the world will certainly come to pass, and His plan for your life, taking you from "here to eternity" can come true also! Have you felt the "stirrings" of His Spirit? Has His divine Presence been moving on your heart, leading you into a closer walk?