

What Daniel Saw

Daniel 7:1-8

TEXT:

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, ‘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 out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, “Arise, devour much flesh.” After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different 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 horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things” (Dan 7:1-8, ESV).

NOTES:

- A. We come to the first “apocalyptic” section of the Book of Daniel.
 - 1. “Apocalypse” comes from the Greek for “revelation” and refers to writing that uses veiled images to convey its message. The Book of Revelation begins with *apokalypsis*; hence, similar writing is called “apocalyptic.”
 - 2. Several things need to be kept in mind about the apocalyptic genre.
 - a. Those who first read it would well have understood the meaning.
 - b. The images used throughout apocalyptic writing were common images in that day.
 - c. Many truths were written in apocalyptic fashion to keep the authorities from uncovering the meaning.
- B. The four winds of heaven were stirring up the sea.
 - 1. “The four winds of heaven” seem to represent divine power of some sort.
 - 2. This is the divine power that reigns over the kingdoms of the world.
 - a. Of course, God does not overrule the freewill of man.
 - b. However, God does use his providence to accomplish his purposes.
 - 3. Scripture does provide evidence of God’s leading rulers to carry out his will.
 - a. Is 45:1-7; Jer 27:5-7.
 - b. God did, at times, use means to overrule the actions of man, but never their will. Therefore, the kings depicted here were free to act how they saw fit. Yet, God used their actions to fulfill his purpose.
- C. It is generally recognized that the “great sea” represents the worldly powers hostile to God.
 - 1. God speaks of waters coming over Israel in regard to the Assyrian invasion (Is 8:6-10).
 - 2. God also speaks in a quite similar way regarding Egypt (Jer 46:7-9).
- D. It is quite obvious here that the four beasts represent the same four world powers presented in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision (chapter 2).
- E. The lion represents Babylon.
 - 1. Babylon was the first nation to achieve world dominion.
 - a. Egypt would be the only nation that could really be compared to Babylon prior to this era.
 - b. But, Egypt never had nearly as much domination as did Babylon.
 - 2. The people would have been familiar with the figure of the winged lion that guarded the palaces of Babylon.
 - a. The lion was practically a symbol of Babylonian power.
 - b. Other prophets also used the image of a lion to represent Babylon (cf. Jer 50:17; Ezek 17:3, 12).
 - 3. The plucking off the plumes of the lion & the giving it a human mind undoubtedly refers to a time when Babylon would be “de-beasted and humanized.” Surely, this refers to the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar.
- F. The second beast is like a bear; this bear represents the Medo-Persian Empire.
 - 1. The bear is more slow & heavy-growing; it was, therefore, a good choice to represent the distinction between Babylon & Persia.
 - 2. That it has three ribs in its mouth demonstrates that it isn’t content with one body but wants to devour many.

- a. The bear is commanded by God to arise & devour more.
 - b. The Medo-Persian Empire devoured much more than did the Babylonians.
- G. The third beast symbolizes Alexander the Great & the Greek Empire.
1. About 150 years after the Persians had invaded Greece & burned Athens, Greeks still wanted vengeance.
 - a. War with the Persians demanded unity, but Greece was fragmented into rival city-states after the Peloponnesian War.
 - b. Philip rode into this vacuum intent on uniting Greece & invading Persia.
 - 1) Philip and his son Alexander went south & began fighting to unite Greece.
 - 2) When Philip was killed by an assassin, Alexander made the dream of conquering Persia his own.
 2. Alexander set out on a spring day in 334 BC leading 30,000 soldiers & 5,000 cavalry.
 - a. He spent the next 11 years in military victory after victory.
 - b. When he arrived in Babylon in 323 BC, he became ill with a fever & quickly died.
 - 1) Alexander was not yet 33 years old.
 - 2) His empire stretched halfway across the world—from Europe to Asia.
 3. The ferocious & swift beast represented by the leopard was a good image to depict Alexander's kingdom.
 - a. The kingdom rose quickly & died just as quickly.
 - b. The four heads of the beast represent the four-way division of the kingdom after Alexander's death.
 - 1) Four of Alexander's generals were given parts of his kingdom.
 - 2) These four kingdoms dominated the world scene until the next empire—the Romans—appeared on the scene & swallowed up these others.
 4. Notice that at verse 6, Daniel is told that dominion was given to the third beast. This again demonstrates the providence of God.
- H. The fourth beast—the Roman Empire—could not adequately be described by any animal known to man.
1. This demonstrates the utterly unique nature of this beast.
 - a. It used its iron teeth to devour the other kingdoms of the world.
 - b. What it could not devour, it stamped out with its feet.
 2. The images of devouring & stamping are good images for Rome—The empire wasn't interested in helping conquered people, but they often conquered for the act of conquering.
 3. The number 10, like the number 7, symbolizes completeness.
 - a. The idea in the ten horns is very likely that world power was greatly multiplied.
 - b. We probably shouldn't try to pinpoint what emperors are being represented.
 4. A little horn came up that supplanted three of the other horns.
 - a. This is very interesting imagery.
 - 1) The little horn must be quite a bit bigger than the others (it forces three of the other horns out by their roots).
 - 2) But, it is a "little" horn & thus it is not as strong as all the others put together.
 - b. The little horn has eyes like a man & speaks great things.
 - c. We will explore this imagery later in the chapter.