

Daniel 7

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and Daniel's Vision

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The Two Perspectives on the Same History

When Daniel had the vision of these four powers as it is given in Dan. 7, they are presented to his eye as four ravenous beasts. The vision as dreamt by Nebuchadnezzar was comparatively external, as man's eye might see; but the same objects seen by the prophet were according to what a spiritual understanding could enter into. The reader may find an analogy in the parables referred to, first some before all in public, then others to the disciples within the house (Matt. 13).

In Dan. 7 the prophet sees the four powers emerge from the sea or ungoverned mass of peoples: first, a lion with eagle's wings, which ere long is humbled; secondly, a bear which raised up itself on one side and had a measured voracity; thirdly, a leopard with four wings, and eventually four heads, which none of the preceding had; lastly, a beast to which none in the realm of nature answered, beyond all dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly, with great iron teeth, devouring and destroying with contempt, diverse from all before, and at length with the peculiarity of ten horns, &c.; And here, answering to the little stone of Dan. 2, we have the Son of man before the Ancient of days, receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him: an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. Here we have the internal view according to God's mind, with yet more added to the interpretation.

But it may be remarked in passing, that the intervening chapters are as valuable for the world-powers, as Dan. 1 we have seen to be for the moral state of Daniel. Dan. 3 shows that the first recorded act of Nebuchadnezzar was to enforce the most senseless idolatry, on the king's authority, as a means of binding together the peoples, nations, and languages; which only brought out fidelity at all cost on the part of the three Hebrew youths, the remnant, and the Gentile king's recognition of God their deliverer. Dan. 4 points to the Gentile power, after

the seven times of a beast's heart, restored to praise the King of heaven. Dan. 5 is plainly the profaning Gentile judged in the destruction of Babylon; as Dan. 6 attests the Gentile that took the place of God (according to the law that passeth not) confessing the living God Who alone rescues from the power of the enemy, and His kingdom what shall not be destroyed and His dominion unto the end. It is in the then facts the prefiguration of Gentile power abased and of Jew saved at the end to God's glory and the triumph of His kingdom. For no prophecy of scripture is of private (of its own, its isolated) interpretation. Every one bears, all converge, on the grand object of God in the exaltation of the Anointed, at the close of man's busy restless day. The Holy Spirit in what is written never stops short of that conclusion, so worthy of God and His Son, so blessed for the universe and every creature in it, save those that have rebelled persistently against His will. No accomplishment in the past, even if true and important, exhausts the meaning or satisfies the divine end.

The Moral Lesson of the Four Beasts

If ever man tried to govern the world of his day by his own will absolutely, it was "the head of gold"; and as he sinned in giving the glory not to the Most High but to himself, he was abased personally as no monarch or man was before or since. But mercy intervened in due time, and presented a hope "at the end of the days," which shall not make ashamed; when the nations shall be gladdened with His people and hope in Him Whom they together slew on the tree.

When the monarch took counsel with others, nobles or military chiefs, it was not really better. And when it was avowedly the people with or without an emperor, no tyranny so selfish, none so oppressive, nor so presumptuous against the true God. Never will the divine ideal be realized till He come again to reign, Whose right it is in the fullest way, divine and human, the Father of the age to come, the Prince of peace. All governments meanwhile are imperfect and provisional in His providence, though every soul in Christianity is bound to be

subject, as unto higher authorities of this world. The existing authorities, whatever the form, are ordained of God; and he that ranges himself against the authority is a resister of the appointment of God. Yet consisting of sinful men, not one of any sort but has failed and sinned. How blessed to know that He, Who is coming to be King over all the earth, here lived and died and rose and ascended, not only the Lord but the Servant of all, and the Servant of God in serving all others not in love only but as the propitiation for our sins.

For indeed there is one Man, and one Man only, Who never thought of any other object but doing or suffering the will of God. It was therefore and necessarily one course of ever deepening humiliation, though moral glory, till He reached a depth unfathomable save to Him. He it is Who, when He returns in power and glory, will take the whole world, as scripture fully shows. Meanwhile the Lord Jesus is very far from now governing the world. If He were, would He suffer Satan to be god and prince, as God's word declares he is, even since Christ took His seat on the Father's throne?

God's providential care does not fail of course, but what occupies Christ now is His loving ways with the church, and saving sinners to serve God and wait for Him from heaven. They are not of the world as He is not, and He is coming to receive them to Himself in the Father's house. This is far better. No matter how effectual and glorious the government of the world by-and-by when Christ reigns, it is not at all comparable to union with Him even now, and suffering with Him here below, and enjoying His love as Bridegroom for ever in heaven. This is what Christ is now carrying on in God's children, that, when He shall be manifested, we may be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.

The Fourth Empire Revived and Judged

Returning to the first vision, we note that it was a great image, whose brightness was excellent, and the form thereof terrible. So it was seen by Nebuchadnezzar;

whereas Daniel was given to behold the self-same first empire as a lion with eagle's wings. This power was not to endure long, because its continuance was measured, as Jeremiah (ch. 25:11, 12) had already predicted, by the captivity of Judah -- in round numbers about seventy years. It was a power of peculiar majesty and splendor, Nebuchadnezzar being called "the head of gold," as it appears to be in part, if not mainly, from receiving his power as king of kings direct from God in a way that none else of these empires did afterwards.

Rome and Rome alone is the empire which must rise again, as we learn in Rev. 13 and more awfully than of old, quite falling in with what Daniel predicts of its end in chs. 2 and 7. The outline was manifested clearly enough in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and yet more in the vision of Daniel. Then above all in the Revelation our attention is drawn to a principle of the greatest moment. Most is said throughout on the fourth or Roman empire. Thereon the Spirit of God dwells most, because of its collision with the Lord Jesus.

Nothing so wonderful in all past history as that which is predicted in the Book of Revelation, as for instance this three-fold condition and its moral source at the end, as well as God's judgment of it: "the beast that was, is not (which we can now say still applies), and shall come forth out of the bottomless pit" (as Christ Who died and rose will be present from heaven).

The Son of Man and the Kingdom

When Christ comes and those that are His along with Him from heaven, He will smite the powers in open blasphemous rebellion (Rev. 19), and call all the nations to account, as He will in Matt. 25:31-46. The two leaders civil and religious will be thrown living into hell. Their followers and kings and armies will be slain on the spot. The satellite kings "have one mind, and shall give their power and authority to the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they

that are with Him (the glorified saints) are called, chosen, and faithful." "For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (Rev. 17:13, 14, 17).

So He in Dan. 7 answers to the "little stone" of ch. 2. He is seen coming to the Ancient of days, and receiving dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. It opens with the execution of consuming judgment on earth, and most unsparingly where most light had been given and given up.

Is it possible to find a scene in stronger contrast with grace? The gospel of God's grace is founded on Christ's first coming, and on His death, resurrection, and ascension; for His object was atoningly to suffer to God's glory for sins. When He comes again, it will be as the "little stone cut without hands," wholly apart from human means to destroy the kingdoms (then apostate), and to establish God's kingdom in power, righteousness and glory over the earth. He will appear from heaven, and (falling, as we see in Dan. 2 and 7, on the Roman empire) will efface all the authority set forth by the image or by the four beasts. The beast (or he who then shall wield the power of the fourth empire revived) and the false prophet are to be consigned to the burning flame. That is, the imperial as well as the religious chiefs are to meet this unspeakably frightful doom, while their adherents are slain (Rev. 19:19-21). Besides, judgment falls on all the other elements. "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together." So too is it in Daniel's vision of the beasts whose dominion had been taken away and their lives prolonged (Dan. 7:12). There is no sparing of evil longer. Jehovah reigns, and the earth rejoices. It is the Son of man Who makes good the kingdom over all the earth, as His first advent gave grace its scope for heavenly glory, which the Christian and the church should enjoy now in faith.

Supplementary Notes

Short entries from Part Six: Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, preserved word-for-word.

Daniel 7:1, 6, 17, 24

Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, p. 377

The book of Daniel is itself the nearest and weightiest help to explain the difficulties of its several parts. Thus Dan. 2 and 7 reflect light one on another. There is a manifest unity in the colossal image seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which has its answer in "the four great beasts" that "came up from the sea" in Daniel's vision during the first year of Belshazzar's reign. In the visions all were thus seen at once, though in historical fact they were to succeed each other; as the rest of the chapter would plainly enough indicate. It was not a question of what Babylon had been, or of Nebuchadnezzar's succeeding Nabopolassar, but of God's gift of world-empire to these four successive powers. They begin with Nebuchadnezzar, and are terminated by the judgment to be executed on the final form of the fourth or Roman empire by the Stone cut without hands, i.e. God's kingdom wielded by the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. Nabopolassar was doubtless king of Babylon; but in no way head of the image or imperial system which commenced with his son Nebuchadnezzar, to whom God gave this place expressly. He, not his father, could say though arrogantly, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" as he built enormously besides. His foreign conquests were great, yet less momentous than his energetic home policy. But his overthrow of the Jewish kingdom in its last stronghold was the turning-point, and in him the Gentile imperial system began. Dan. 2:37, 38 affords light clear enough for beginning with Nebuchadnezzar and excluding his father or any other before him; as no reasonable mind doubts the parallelism of the two chapters. Compare Jer. 27, Ezek. 12, 17.

Here the comparison of Dan. 8:21, 22 simply and fully solves the difficulty as to Dan. 7:6. So one must say because scripture so explains. The later vision of

Dan. 8 throws light on important details of the second and third powers, laying aside all reference to the first and fourth in Dan. 7. "It is written again" is of the greatest moment when "It is written" is misapplied. Scripture is everywhere consistent as well surely correct. The fourth beast appears with ten horns; yet we know from other scriptures that these mean ten kings at the very close of the last empire, in no way that they were so found when that empire first began. The same remark applies to the four heads of the leopard or Macedonian empire. Each vision gives characteristic differences without in the least implying that they all appeared from the start. Other or subsequent statements correct such an inference as unfounded and contrary to fact.

So "shall arise" in Dan. 7:17 must in fairness be taken as a whole, connecting the three powers to come with the Babylonian though already in being and tottering to its fall. To construe the words with such rigid technicality as to exclude the Babylonish empire from answering to the lion with eagle's wings is, not a difficulty for my exposition, but really a setting of Dan. 7 in opposition to Dan. 2 and a groundless upturning of the plain fact. From a full consideration of these scriptures I hold that truth calls one to interpret the "four kings" which "shall arise" as comprising the beginning to the end of these earthly bestial systems, but not so as to exclude the first beast from Nebuchadnezzar's day; for this would set scripture against scripture and thus disproves itself as erroneous. "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth." One cannot fairly use this to deny retrospect, but must include Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar. For the object is to give the imperial system relative unity; whilst "the first" and "another," &c.; in vv. 4-7, gave also succession adequately, as indeed had been done yet more plainly in Dan. 2. Dan. 2:11, 12 contrast a prolonging of the three previous beasts after the loss of dominion; whereas the fourth is utterly destroyed when it ceases to be an imperial power at the close. Scripture therefore sustains the statements questioned, without meddling with the ordinary version of the passages; it shows that the difficulty

lies rather in divorcing one text from another, instead of receiving all. Scripture cannot be broken.

The Little Horns of Daniel 7 and 8: Not the Same

Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, p. 378

First, the very language differs. The prophet, who wrote in Aramaic from ch. 2:4, returned to Hebrew after ch. 7. The course of the four world-powers is given in a most instructive two-fold form, one Nebuchadnezzar's vision (2), the other Daniel's (7), with corresponding differences, in the language of the first empire, the captor of Judah. The chapters between contribute important moral features needed to fill up the divinely given picture. From Dan. 8 we receive special details which concern the Jews, which are accordingly given in Hebrew.

Secondly, Dan. 8 deals with the second and third of the world-powers, Med.-Persia, and Javan or Greece the first great ruler of which was to have his vast kingdom broken into four in due time after his death, and of course with inferior power. One of these was to meddle disastrously with the Jews and their religion and worship above all, whether in the type that is fulfilled, or in the antitype of the latter time "when the transgressors are come to the full."

Thirdly, the empire of Babylon, the lion-like beast with eagle's wings, had a unity peculiar to itself. The Med.-Persian (a bear in ch. 7, a ram in ch. 8 with two high horns of which the higher came up last) answers truly and solely to the second of these world-powers, which, fierce and devouring in general, was mild and generous toward the Jews, as indeed was the notable horn of the Macedonian power, Alexander the Great. In this third empire the marked and settled partition after its founder's death was four-fold, which no historian can question.

But the no less marked division of the fourth or Roman power is into ten horns, of course contemporary, with one small at its rise which plucks up three by the roots, as remarkable for its intelligence as for its pride and blasphemous audacity. Here however we are in presence of that which awaits its fulfilment,

even admitting a partial application to past history. For that horn by its lawlessness brings on, not providential loss of dominion as in the case of the earlier beasts, but direct, distinctive, and divine judgment at the appearing of God's kingdom in the person of the Son of man. How can these things be? The Revelation answers by the rising again of the fourth or Roman empire, when its imperial head (slain unto death) is healed to the wonder of the whole world (Rev. 13:3), the beast that was, and is not (its present negation), and shall be present, having emerged from the abyss. For it will be the brief destined hour of the dragon's wrath, power, and authority. Here also is shown that the Roman beast had distinctively seven successive forms of government or heads, besides (at the close, if not before also) ten contemporaneous horns or kings. Cp. Rev. 17:8-12 with Dan. 7.

Who but the unintelligent could confound the little horn of Dan. 8 with that of ch. 7? or either the western or the north-eastern chief with the wilful king, to reign at the time of the end in Palestine, described in Dan. 11:36-39? The last no doubt is the Antichrist, here viewed politically, in 2 Thess. 2 religiously as the man of sin opposed to the Man of righteousness, Who will appear from heaven to destroy him. There are many antichrists; but this does not justify the pretentious ignorance of scripture, which jumbles all three into Antiochus Epiphanes. For he was but a type of the final representative of that power, the enemy of the Antichrist whose ally is the last chief of the Roman empire: all to perish for ever in the day of Jehovah.

The Bible Treasury, New Series, vol. 1:4, etc.