

THE WORLD MENAGERIE

by Ray C. Stedman

Scripture is given to us that we might understand what is happening in our world and what God is doing in the course of history. There is nothing more helpful in this respect than to give attention to the great outlines of future events foretold in various prophetic passages of the Bible. So far in this series we have been looking at the second chapter of Daniel, but today we turn to the next prophetic section, Chapter 7.

There are certain introductory matters that are given to us in the beginning of the chapter that help us to understand the background of it. They are gathered up in the first verse.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had 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. {Dan 7:1 RSV}

This places the time of the vision as occurring toward the end of the Babylonian empire. It was in the first year of Belshazzar, who was the last king of Babylon. This ties in closely with the account in the fifth chapter, where Belshazzar made a great feast and handwriting appeared on the wall and that night the kingdom was taken by the Medes and the Persians. This vision then occurs perhaps thirty or thirty-five years after the great dream image that was recorded in Chapter 2. This time it is Daniel that has a dream and with the dream come certain visions.

There are three separate visions recounted. One runs from Verse 2 through Verse 6, the vision of the three beasts that arise out of the sea. From Verse 7 through Verse 12 is a second vision which involves a fourth beast and also the Ancient of Days. Verses 13-14 involve still a third vision. Daniel sees a most remarkable person who is presented to the Ancient of Days. This is one of the clear instances in the Old Testament where we have a pre-incarnate view of Jesus Christ.

Then, beginning with Verse 15, there is a general interpretation of these visions. From Verse 19 through to the end of the chapter the angel concentrates upon the remarkable fourth beast, as of great significance to us. The structure of the chapter seems to follow the same general division of Chapter 2, the great dream image which Nebuchadnezzar saw: There are four divisions of history, finally ending at the invasion of earth by God and establishment of his kingdom. In Chapter 2 there came a stone cut out of the mountain without hands that smote the image on its feet and destroyed all the kingdoms of men. In this chapter, it is the Ancient of Days who sends the Son of Man to establish his everlasting dominion upon earth.

Because these two chapters seem to follow the same general pattern, most of the interpreters of Chapter 7 view the four beasts that open the chapter as picturing the same nations as the four divisions of the dream in Chapter 2, i.e., Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and a fourth empire beginning with Rome but extending clear down to the second coming of Jesus Christ. This is what is called the "historical" interpretation of Chapter 7, which says that most of it lies in the past and only the fourth beast concerns us in the present. There are great Bible teachers who support that view, and though I am less than the least of the prophets, I, too, for many years held the same view. But let us turn to this vision of the beasts in Daniel 7 and see why I rather think it pictures conditions among the nations which exist just before the return of Jesus Christ. In doing so we shall not view this as a telescope, looking down the long course of history from Daniel's day till now (you get that in Chapter 2), but this is more like a zoom camera which comes right in upon the events of the last days. If we are drawing near to these last days, these events will intensely concern us.

Notice, first, that a certain locale is marked out for us in which these events are to occur:

Daniel said, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea." {Dan 7:2 RSV}

The great sea is always, in Scripture, the Mediterranean Sea. You will find many verses which establish that clearly, from many parts of the Scripture. It is the great sea that forms the western boundary of Israel. Daniel saw the four winds of heaven blowing upon and stirring up or creating a tumult, in this great sea. Thus, the locale of these visions centers upon the Mediterranean and involves an apparent struggle for the mastery of the Mediterranean area.

Daniel goes on to say,

"And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another." {Dan 7:3 RSV}

It is apparent from what Daniel has said that the four beasts stand for nations which in some way relate to the great struggle which shall occur in the Mediterranean area. The nations involved are seen as beasts, not as parts of a man, as was true in Chapter 2. This is because this dream presents God's view of the nations. In Chapter 2 it is Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and he saw the nations as man sees them, in their outward glory, pomp, and circumstance. But here we have God's view. Interestingly enough, wherever God views the nations they are almost always described as beasts.

Surely it is an apt description. You can hear them growling, snarling and snapping at one another even today. Read the accounts in the newspapers, or listen to a session of the United Nations and you will hear them reacting to one another very much as beasts.

The first beast is described.

"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 upon two feet like a man; and the mind of a man was given to it." {Dan 7:4 RSV}

What shall we make of this first beast? According to the historical view, this is Babylon, the very nation in which Daniel was living at the time of his dream. But there are several things that indicate that this is not a proper explanation of this first beast:

First, the date of the vision is against this interpretation. It occurred in the first year of Belshazzar who was the last king of Babylon. Yet Daniel sees the beast as coming up out of the sea, indicating a future event. Historically, Babylon had already long since been established and it seems hardly likely that Daniel would see a vision of the future which would include that which had already taken place.

Also, the language of the chapter suggests that this is not merely a repetition of Chapter 2. One of the remarkable things about the book of Daniel is that the section from Chapter 2 through Chapter 7 is written in a different language than the rest of the book. The remainder is in Hebrew, as is the rest of the Old Testament. But this section appears in Aramaic, which is a closely related language to Hebrew. It was the language Jesus spoke when he was here on earth. It is about as different from Hebrew as Norwegian is from Swedish. Apparently the section is written in Aramaic because it pertains to the Gentile nations and not to the Jews.

Chapter 7 is the close of that Aramaic section, as Chapter 2 was its beginning, and it seems hardly likely that we would find in Chapter 7 a repetition of the meaning of the dream in Chapter 2, when the whole section is addressed to the same people and written in the same language. Thus the language rather confirms the idea that Chapter 7 is a different interpretation.

Third, there is nothing in the history of Babylon that corresponds to what is said here about the first beast. The usual interpretation is that the reference to wings being plucked off and the beast made to stand on its two feet, with the mind of a man being given to it, is usually explained as a reference to Nebuchadnezzar's insanity. Previously in Daniel we are told that Nebuchadnezzar became mad and for seven years lived out in the field as an animal. His kingdom was taken away from him for that period of time because of the pride of his heart. But at the end of the seven-year period his sanity returned and he was restored to his throne. But the interesting thing is that all of that happened at least twenty years before this vision was given to Daniel. Again it seems

most unlikely that this would refer to a past event.

It rather seems to symbolize a strange decline of power on the part of a nation to be involved in a struggle for the mastery of the Mediterranean, at a time, as we learn from the rest of the vision, in the days immediately preceding the coming of Jesus Christ again to earth. The decline of power is represented by the wings being plucked off the beast and then a switch is made to intellectual or moral achievement rather than military might.

When I read this, and thought of it as something that might be contemporary, I could not help but be struck by the remarkable parallelism to the course of the British Empire since World War II. I do not claim that this is the interpretation of this symbolism because prophecy is not given to us that we might prophesy, it is rather given to indicate major trends. But if we are living in the last days we may possibly expect to recognize the fulfillment of this. Certainly the British Empire has long been symbolized by a lion, and the wings, of course, indicate speed and power. But in the vision the wings are plucked off, and thus a change occurs in the course of the history of this nation. It turns from being a military power to an intellectual power. This is remarkably close to what we are seeing happening to the British Empire in our day. We have all witnessed one of the unusual events of history in that quite gradually, but before our eyes, British military prestige has declined all over the world. Britain is now changing to a nation that is stressing intellectual achievements.

You can imagine my surprise and astonishment in reading the writings of Sir Robert Anderson, who was for many years head of Scotland Yard during the reign of Queen Victoria. He was also a noted prophetic student who brought all his marvelous investigating ability to bear upon the solving of prophetic problems. I discovered that in his book, *The Coming Prince*, written on the book of Daniel, there was a most amazing statement. Commenting on this first beast of Daniel 7, he says:

May not the opening portion of this vision refer to the gigantic struggle which must come some day for supremacy in the Mediterranean which will doubtless carry with it the sovereignty of the world? The lion may possibly typify England, whose vast naval power may be symbolized by the eagles' wings. The plucking of the wings may represent the loss of her position as mistress of the seas.

That amazing statement was made in the days when England was at the zenith of her power as a maritime nation. In the days of Queen Victoria the British fleet was in control of the oceans of the world. Her present decline and change of character certainly suggests a possible explanation of the first beast.

Let us go on and see if any of the rest fits this theory. We have next brought before us the second beast,

"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.'" {Dan 7:5 RSV}

The historical view has generally taken this to mean the Medo-Persian empire, which followed Babylon upon the scene of history. But there are several striking things that are against that:

First, in the eighth chapter we find that the Medo-Persian empire is specifically named and appears in the form of a beast, but the beast is not a bear, but a great ram. It seems to me unlikely that the Scripture would employ two symbolisms of animals for the same empire, one time a bear, and in the next chapter, a ram.

Second, we are told here that the bear was raised up on one side. This has usually been taken to indicate the division between the Medes and the Persians, with the Persians being dominant. But several Hebrew scholars indicate that what is really said here is not, "raised up on one side," but what is really said about this bear is that "it made for itself one dominion." That is a closer, more literal translation of the Aramaic.

If this power is recognizable today it is much more likely that this pictures for us the Soviet Union, which is made up of many republics joined together, The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the U.S.S.R. It has had as its symbol from the earliest times a bear, and is engaged as we see today in a struggle for Mediterranean supremacy.

Further, it has fulfilled what is reported here about it. The beast was told, "Arise, devour much flesh. " Nothing is more striking than the way the Soviet Union has reached out around the world and encompassed many peoples by conquest and propaganda and thus has literally devoured much flesh.

Now if you ask about the three ribs, I confess to you that I cannot identify them. Perhaps a more careful study of the U.S.S.R. might divulge what this symbolism represents. Some have suggested it might refer to the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which, unlike satellite nations, are now an integral part of the Soviet Union. I do not at all suggest this in a dogmatic fashion, but I do think it is worth considering.

The third beast appears in Verse 6:

"After this I looked, and lo, 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." {Dan 7:6 RSV}

Historically this is taken to be the kingdom of Alexander the Great, the Grecian empire. But again, we have the Grecian empire clearly named in Chapter 8 and depicted as a beast, but not as a leopard; it is there a he-goat with a notable horn between his eyes, as we will see when we come to Chapter 8. The historical view draws great significance from the four heads of the beast which, it is said, refer to the fact that when Alexander died his kingdom was divided among his four generals. This is historically true, but the interesting thing is that this beast is seen to have four heads from its very beginning. In Chapter 8 it is clearly indicated that the four divisions of Alexander's kingdom occur after his death, but here the four heads appear on the beast from its very beginning in the struggle for Mediterranean mastery.

I am tempted to view this as possibly depicting Israel, especially because of the four wings which speak of rapidity in striking, the ability to move quickly in military power. After the Six-day War who can deny that Israel has this kind of power? But at present I cannot explain the four heads. It does suggest a junta, or perhaps a coalition government. It might possibly be modern Greece, which does operate under a junta. Or it may be a nation yet to appear as a Mediterranean power which is not visible to us as yet: perhaps it is there now but not identifiable.

At any rate we have clearly here three great nations, national powers, which struggle for Mediterranean mastery. They are not successive, although the prophet describes them successively; they seem to appear contemporaneously, and they struggle for the mastery of the great sea.

In Verses 7-8 we have a second vision: The fourth beast is brought before us, and the rest of the chapter centers on this.

"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue, 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 7:7-8 RSV}

This is now the central theme of the chapter. The remainder of the chapter focuses upon this fourth beast. There are several noteworthy things about it immediately visible:

First, the mention of iron ties it to the iron kingdom of Chapter 2, which is the fourth empire to occupy leadership in the affairs of the world. It began with the Roman Empire, which was clearly marked by an iron quality. Also, it is described as breaking in pieces and crushing all opposition and stamping it underfoot. This is markedly similar to what was said about the iron kingdom in Chapter 2. Perhaps what is said about stamping the residue with its feet, would indicate that this beast in some way subdues the other three beasts and takes over their power. That may well be what is meant when a little horn, the eleventh one that comes up, plucks up three of the other horns before it. We might possibly identify those as the first three beasts.

Nevertheless it is clear that this fourth beast has one remarkable feature about it -- it has ten horns. These ten horns correspond to the ten toes of the image in Chapter 2. We are told there that in the days of those [ten] kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. Now we have a beast with its ten horns, and it is clearly a coalition of ten nations which unite together to give their power to one. An eleventh one, joining them later, overpowers three of the original ten horns (and as I have suggested, these may possibly be the first three beasts) and becomes the dominant power of earth. It makes its appearance by joining the struggle for Mediterranean mastery.

There are further details on this in the book of Revelation. One of the remarkable things about the Bible is the way it ties together. Though the book of Revelation was written some six hundred years after the book of Daniel, there are most remarkable parallels which tie these two books together. We have seen this before but it may be helpful to note some further details. In Revelation, John the apostle says:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns, and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. {Rev 13:1-2a RSV}

Do you see the similarity? He gathers up the characteristics of the first three beasts in Daniel 7, the lion, the bear, and the leopard, and they appear as features of this great beast which John sees in Revelation 13. This suggests again that in some way the fourth beast seems to amalgamate (conquer, perhaps) the other three beasts.

Notice also, in Chapter 17 of Revelation, certain other interpretation given to us about the beast John sees:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.' And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. {Rev 17:1-3 RSV}

This is clearly the same beast we saw in Revelation but notice something else. The symbolism here is remarkable. This great harlot, standing for the false church (not of any one denomination but false religion -- false Christianity as it exists among all denominations today) is seen to be seated first upon many waters, and then, when John gets a closer view he sees her seated upon a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The waters, therefore, represent the same thing that the beast does.

In this same chapter we have the waters interpreted for us. In Verse 15, we are told:

And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." {Rev 17:15 RSV}

Many peoples, multitudes of them, nations joining together, and also various languages represented among them; all of which agrees with what we have seen before in Daniel, that this fourth kingdom, the fourth beast of Chapter 7, is made up of many nations, a Western empire of nations, joining together in a great confederacy to move as a unit in its final form. It is made up of peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues and yet, in its final form, it is headed up by ten kings or kingdoms which, as we are told in Verses 12-14, unite together.

"And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful." {Rev 17:12-14}

That gives us a clear indication of the time in which this is to occur. It is immediately preceding the appearance

again of Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb who conquers the nations of earth.

Now we return to Daniel 7, where we shall look very quickly and briefly at the second part of Daniel's vision, the vision of the Ancient of Days.

**"As I looked,
thrones were placed
and one that was ancient of days took his seat;
his raiment was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
its wheels were burning fire.
A stream of fire issued
and came forth from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.**

"I looked then because of the sound of the great words which the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time." {Dan 7:9-12 RSV}

What a remarkable vision! It is very similar. you will notice, to the vision recorded in Revelation 4 and 5, where John looked into heaven and saw a judgment scene with God seated upon a throne, and twenty-four elders on thrones around him. They, too, were passing judgment upon the affairs of earth, just as Daniel sees it here, with great uncounted hosts of angels waiting upon God's word. God is in the midst of his council, and as the council debates the matters of earth, sentence is passed upon this blasphemous horn, the last ruler of the fourth kingdom, this horn which had "eyes like a man, and a mouth speaking great things." We will see more of him in our next study together.

Then Daniel is shown the One who is chosen to execute the judgment.

**"I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like the son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." {Dan 7:13-14 RSV}**

Who is this "Son of Man"? Who else could it be than the Lord Jesus, the One who is seen also in the opening chapters of Revelation as possessing all power in heaven and on earth and who takes the seven-sealed book from the hands of the One seated upon the throne? He is acknowledged there as the only one in the history of mankind who is worthy to open the book and to unfold the seals. Now here he comes with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days.

Perhaps this is the passage the Lord Jesus had in mind when he addressed the chief priests at the time he was brought before them and was charged with blasphemy. He told them that the days would come when they would see "The Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven," {Matt 26:64, Mark 14:62}. He was referring to this passage in which Daniel had predicted that great event.

What can we make of all this?

Surely there is hardly any comment needed. It is obvious that God's intent is to allow sinful humanity to run its course until all that is hidden underneath, the evil pretensions of the human heart, are brought out and revealed in the conduct of men toward one another. When history reaches its lowest ebb, when the sin of man breaks forth in its most vulgar and most evil forms, then God intends to intervene once again. Now this is absolutely sure. We must settle on this. This is not a mere vagary of Scripture; it is the central teaching of the Word of God. We have as authority to teach this, not only the prophets who spoke of old, but also the apostles of the New Testaments and, even more importantly, the direct testimony of Jesus Christ himself. He quotes the book of Daniel and enlarges upon these things. He gives the same picture as Daniel concerning his return. He says, "The Son of Man shall come in his glory with all his angels with him," {cf, Matt 25:31}. Then his throne will be established and all nations shall gather before him. He gives us that same picture in Matthew 24 and 25.

In other words, if this is not the outline which history will follow, the mold into which it is poured, then Christianity is a fraud. If events are finally going to take another shape, then we have been following a delusion and we would be much better off if it were done away with. But the basis of our faith is the veracity of these passages. We believe God intends to fulfill them exactly as described.

What does that mean to you as an individual?

What does it mean, that God is not going to permit man to work out his problems, ultimately, and find the solutions he desires? Instead he will demonstrate that man has no capacity to do so. Man cannot work these problems out on his own. There is no way that it can be done. It is only as he relates to the God who made him, and who understands him, and welcomes again the intervention of God into his life, that any kind of human problem can be worked out.

Is that not the teaching of prophecy? What other conclusion can we draw from this, than that God himself intends to demonstrate it in the course of history?

In our day we are seeing a remarkable struggle for supremacy developing in the Mediterranean. Every knowledgeable eye is upon that struggle. It is admitted everywhere today that the Mideast crisis is the most serious crisis our world faces, far greater in its possible impact than the Vietnamese struggle.

Is this crisis laying the groundwork for the appearance of these great nations Daniel saw? Who can say? I do not say it is the fulfillment of it, but I say that events are clearly heading in that direction and that the movements we see today are producing the final form pictured here. We can be confident that, as history unfolds, it will follow the pattern that Daniel, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, and the prophets and apostles have outlined for us.

All of this should give us confidence in the Word of God. It should make us aware that God is in control of history. It should make us realize that we have to rethink the value of our lives in terms of these events, that we must ask ourselves continually the question, "Where is my influence being put, where is the impact of my life?" Is it all wrapped up with things that shall be blown away with the wind? Or is it involved in that which God intends to establish with men? Am I an instrument of his working, or am I in direct opposition to what God is doing in the world today? All these things are given to us in order that we might evaluate life, ourselves, and the world around us.

May God help us, as we face these great revelations, to understand ourselves more thoroughly.

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