

PROPHETIC STUDIES

PART II.



The Four World Powers and Prophecy in Picture



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TWOPENCE.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE CONCERNING PROPHETIC STUDIES.

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The Four World-Powers.

THE Book of Daniel holds an important and unique place amongst the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The prophets in general, especially the greater ones, occupied themselves with the evils of their own times; thence looking forward to Messiah's kingdom, when all the wrong things will be put right, and the gracious purposes of God be accomplished. But of the long intervening period they say practically nothing. The book of Daniel fills up this gap. Its subject is, "The times of the Gentiles," an expression used by the Lord Jesus in Luke xxi. 24 to denote the period of Gentile supremacy in the earth. Daniel had no direct message for his people concerning their moral state, nor was it given to him to unfold the glories and blessings of the coming kingdom. His theme is Gentile dominion in the earth during Israel's rejection, and its overthrow at the appearing of the Son of Man. Having brought us to this point, the verge of the Millennial kingdom, Daniel's prophecy abruptly closes.

It was God's original purpose to govern and bless the earth by means of the people of Israel and the house of David. Their gross unfaithfulness has delayed for the present the realization of this. It is impossible for God to uphold and sanction wickedness; hence the overthrow of David's throne, and the expulsion of both houses of Israel from His land. Meanwhile, God has committed supreme power in the earth into Gentile hands. It is a remarkable fact that while God was still bearing with Israel and the house

of David no other power was permitted to attain to universal supremacy, though both the ancient monarchies of Egypt and Assyria earnestly strove together for it.

Daniel vii. gives us three visions that were granted to the prophet in a single night, with the angel's interpretation in part. The prophet dreamed that he was standing on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the waters of which were being agitated by the four winds of heaven. "Four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another." The sea represents the nations (Rev. xiii. 1; xvii. 15) in a state of disturbance. The four beasts are the great Gentile Empires which have held supreme power successively since the overturning of Jehovah's earthly throne in Jerusalem. (For this grand title given to David's throne see 1 Chron. xxix. 23). It may be asked, Why should these Powers be represented as wild beasts? By this God would show us their moral character as it appears in His sight. The beast lives by force, and for the gratification of its lusts, without any sense of responsibility towards God. Even so the Gentile Powers have been characterized by greed of conquest, and lust of power and glory. God has not been in all their thoughts. It is not a little remarkable that the Powers have (perhaps unconsciously that they were fulfilling God's Word) voluntarily accepted the wild beast character. Is it not a fact that many have adopted either wild beasts or birds of prey as their national symbols? Witness, the lion of England and the eagle of the United States, etc.

In chapter ii., in the vision granted to Nebuchadnezzar, these Empires are viewed in an altogether different way. The king saw, not four wild beasts, but a great image composed of four metals. The image shows us Gentile dominion as one complete

whole, with its successive deteriorations in character of rule; beginning with autocracy in Nebuchadnezzar, and ending with a mixture of democracy and monarchical government in the fourth Empire. The re-iteration of the number four is to be noted. Four powers, and no more, are to be divinely allowed world-supremacy. Let all other aspirants beware!

It is sometimes said that the visions of the book of Daniel cannot be understood without a considerable knowledge of the facts of ancient history. This is not true. If it were so, a large number of God's saints would have to remain in the dark as to the meaning of these things, whereas God has written His Word, not only for the learned, but for the simple also. I hope to be able to show, as we proceed with our subject, that God has Himself explained the visions of this book (and especially those of our chapter) in other parts of the inspired Word.

BABYLON.

The first of the Mediterranean beasts was like a lion, having eagle's wings. Here we have Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire. As we read in chap. ii. 37: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee the kingdom," etc. Before Nebuchadnezzar's armies both Egypt and Assyria fell, and the supreme place in the earth fell to him. Compare, for the symbols of lion and eagle, (Jer. iv. 7; xlix. 19, 22; Ezek. xvii. 3). Next, Babylon's humiliation is shown. "I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon two feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it." God had foreseen that Nebuchadnezzar and his family would be

no more faithful in the place of power than the house of David, and so foretold in Jer. xxvii. 7 that Babylon's dominion should end with Nebuchadnezzar's son's son. This was Belshazzar, who was upon the throne when these visions were granted. Think of the king of beasts being made to stand upon its hind legs! How aptly this expresses humiliation! And in the man's heart given to it we see it stripped of its warlike courage. An early English king was called "the Lionhearted," because of his exceptional prowess in war; the opposite of this—a lion with a man's heart—is suggestive of power departed.

MEDO-PERSIA.

The second beast was like a bear. We need have no difficulty here. In Dan. v. 28 we learn that it was the Medes and Persians who overthrew the Babylonian Empire. We are told that the bear raised up itself on one side. This detail is interesting as showing the exceeding accuracy of the Spirit of God. Its meaning is given to us in chap. viii. 3, where the same power appears under the symbol of a two-horned ram, "but one horn was higher than the other, and the higher came up last." This is God's way of noting the fact that the Persian element predominated in the dual second Empire, though it was by no means the most ancient.

GREECE.

The third beast was like a leopard, having on its back four wings of a fowl. We need not go outside the book of Daniel for the interpretation of this. Chap. viii. 21 lets us know that it was the Grecian Power that destroyed the Medo-Persian Empire. The leopard is naturally rapid in its movements; the

addition of wings in the vision speaks of extraordinary rapidity. The fact will be familiar to most that when Alexander led his forces against Persia in order to avenge Xerxes' invasion of Greece (Dan. xi. 2), he conquered almost the whole known world in about twelve years. But for the foolish self-security of the last Persian monarch (Darius Codomannus) the Greek expedition could never have been successful. Historians have sometimes asked why the Persian fleet, which was very powerful, was not sent to the Hellespont to prevent Alexander from crossing over into Asia.* Believers in Scripture need not wonder; God's time had come for the haughty Empire of the Medes and Persians to fall.

Daniel tells us also that the leopard had four heads. These, as chap. viii. 8-22; xi. 4, tell us, are the four military leaders, not of Alexander's posterity, who divided his dominions amongst themselves after his death. Their names were Seleucus, Ptolemy, Cassander, and Lysimachus.

ROME.

The fourth beast occupies by far the largest place in our chapter. God has much to tell us concerning its doings. The prophet does not name it; he was unable to do so, for he had never seen its like. What Empire is represented here? Scripture again comes to our aid; not the Old Testament in this instance, but the New. What Power was supreme in the earth when the Lord Jesus was born? The

* Josephus states that as the Greek army approached Jerusalem, the Jewish high-priest, Jaddua, with a procession of priests, met him, and besought Alexander not to sack the city. Alexander is said to have replied that he had seen such a person in a vision in Macedonia inviting him to attack the Persian Empire, promising him divine aid. Whereupon he was shown Daniel's prophecies concerning himself, which impressed him much.

opening verses of Luke ii., iii., show that it was the Roman Empire; Babylon, Persia, and Greece all having fallen from their high place. Daniel tells us that "it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it." In various respects the Roman beast differed from its predecessors; one particular point comes to my mind now. While Babylon, Persia and Greece rose to eminence under the leadership of great kings (Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Alexander respectively), Rome became a great world-power, while still a Republic. And even when imperial rule was accepted, the forms of republican Government were still maintained.

The last clause of verse 7 demands careful attention—"it had ten horns." We are told in verse 24 that these are ten kings, which raises an important question. When was anything of this kind seen in the Roman Empire of the past? For a long period it had but one head; then for a considerable while there were three or four associated rulers; but anything like what we have before us here has never yet been seen. What, then, are we to understand from the statements of our chapter? Just this, that the history of the Roman Empire is not finished; for no word of God can fall to the ground. Between the two last clauses of verse 7 there is, therefore, a chasm of many hundreds of years, not at all an unusual thing to find in the prophetic Word. John in Patmos saw the same beast re-appearing upon the stage of the future. In Rev. xiii. 1, it is said to rise up out of the sea, and in chap. xvii. 8, it ascends out of the abyss. Together these passages show us that it will re-appear as the result of a disturbed condition of things amongst the nations, and also that the power of Hell will be at work in connexion with it.

While Daniel considered the horns, "there came up another, a little horn, before whom there were

three of the first horns plucked up by the roots." This eleventh horn is Satan's agent for the bringing together of the dismembered parts of the ancient Empire of Rome. He will begin by subjugating three of the European kingdoms, then seven others will be induced, either by craft or by force, to join together with these in a general confederacy. Each kingdom will retain its own sovereign (Rev. xvii. 12), but all will own the supreme leadership of the little horn. It will be much the same condition of things as that which obtained in the German Empire before the great war.

Here, then, we have Satan's king of kings and lord of lords. So completely will the horn wield the whole power of the beast that henceforward in the prophecy "the beast" and "the horn" become practically synonymous terms (see Dan. vii. 11; Rev. xiii. 1-8; xvii. 7-17; xix. 19, 20; xx. 10).

The little horn had eyes like the eyes of a man. This speaks of foresight and intelligence. He has great schemes in his mind which he is determined to carry into effect. The horn had also a mouth speaking great things; pride and boastfulness characterize him. Where Satan's tool of a century ago—Napoleon I.—failed, this personage will succeed, though his success will be of short duration.

It is important to distinguish between the little horn of Dan. vii. and the little horn of Dan. viii. The one arises in the West, out of the *fourth* Empire; the other arises in the East, out of one of the four divisions of the *third* Empire. This last is the king of the North, of whose doings we read so much in chap. xi.

Three things are told us in verse 25 of our chapter concerning the last Roman head. First, he will be blasphemous and infidel—"he will speak great words against the Most High." Second, he will be a perse-

cutor—"he shall wear out the saints of the high places." These are the Jewish saints of the last days. They are called by this name because they (in contrast with the horn) own heaven as the true source of government, and look there for deliverance from their cruel foe (Isa. lxiv. 1-3). Third, the horn "thinks to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand until a time, and times, and half a time." These are the Jewish religious festivals and institutions, which he will be permitted to trample under foot during three and a half years. Anything that bears even a semblance of testimony for God he will not tolerate. This verse shows us why so much space is devoted to the fourth beast in this prophecy. It is because this Empire, more than any of the others, comes into collision with God's people and afterwards with Christ Himself. This is necessarily of great moment with God. In the Roman dominion of the last days will be developed all that man in possession of power is capable of doing against God and His people; and in this dominion Gentile supremacy will come to its end, as we shall presently see.

Following the appearance of the beasts, the prophet beheld a sessional judgment—where, it is not stated; in heaven, in all probability. "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit." Not one throne, but many; for the glorified saints are to have part in this judgment. "Cast down," or "placed," as in the R.V., both mean the same thing really, the allusion being to the Eastern custom of throwing down cushions for the judges to sit upon. We must distinguish between the throne of the Ancient of Days here, and the great white throne of Rev. xx., at which the ungodly dead must stand. It must not be confounded either with the throne of Christ's glory (Matt. xxv. 31) before which the living nations must appear, nor with the Judg-

ment Seat of Christ of 2 Cor. v. 10. This judgment is set, and the books are opened to inquire into the conduct of the Gentile Empires in their use of the power divinely granted to them, and especially are the doings of the little horn looked into by the great Judge of all. "I beheld till the beast (the little horn and the beast being morally one) was slain and his body destroyed, and he was given to be burned with fire" (R.V.). Rev. xix. 20 explains this fully. Being taken in open hostility to the Lord Jesus at His appearing, the Roman chief and his confederate, the Antichrist, will both be cast alive into the lake of fire. No death, no resurrection, no manifestation before the great white throne, as in the case of other guilty ones, but summary judgment at least a thousand years before the last great judgment throne is set up. Truly, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 31).

Parenthtically we are told that while the rest of the beasts had their dominion taken away, their lives were prolonged for a season and time (v. 12). When Babylon lost its imperial place in the earth it did not cease to exist, but remained a flourishing city for centuries afterwards (Peter wrote his first epistle there—1 Pet. v. 13); and Persia and Greece remain before our eyes at this day, though shorn of their ancient power and glory. But when the revived fourth Empire meets its doom, it will be sudden and final; the Roman Empire will never be seen again (Comp.: Dan. ii. 35).

The reflection is indeed a humiliating one that man is always unfaithful when put into any position of trust by God. Each dispensation tells its own sad tale of sin, failure, and broken responsibilities. The Jew cannot point the finger at the Gentile, nor the Gentile at the Jew; the failure is universal, general, and always. Let all our souls profit by the painful lesson.

But is there no one whom God can trust, and who will not fail? Blessed be His name, yes. Accordingly, Daniel "saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him 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 that which shall not be destroyed" (vv. 13, 14). God, then, has One in store—the once-crucified Son of man—Who can be safely entrusted with supreme power in the earth, and Who will use it for His glory, and for the blessing of all His subjects. His kingdom will be heavenly in its character, in contrast with all the kingdoms that have gone before it, whose character has been earthly (v. 17). This is the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision, which brake in pieces the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold; and then became a great mountain, filling the whole earth (Dan. ii. 34, 35).

The Son of man will not administer His kingdom alone; when He reigns, His saints will reign with Him, as verses 18, 22, tell us. These may be divided into three classes: (1) Those of the Old Testament dispensations, who would be specially intended in the book of Daniel; (2) Christ's body, the Church, the aggregate of the saved during the present period (Eph. 1-22); and (3) the two companies of latter-day saints named in Rev. xx. 4. All these are to share with Christ the glories of His kingdom. "The *people* of the saints" (v. 22) must be distinguished from "the saints" themselves. The Jewish people are meant. For them is destined "the *greatness* of the kingdom under the whole heaven";

but they are not said to reign; neither have they anything to do with the heavenly sphere of the kingdom.

The saints are to judge as well as reign (vv. 22-26). This is what the Apostle had in his mind when he rebuked the Corinthians for going to law with one another before the world. "Do ye not know," he indignantly exclaimed, "that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. vi. 1-3). This has reference only to the temporal judgments connected with the kingdom; when eternal issues are in question, we read of one "throne," not "thrones" (Contrast Rev. xx. verses 4 and 11). But the position is nevertheless a wonderful one for us. Once we dreaded the judgment of God for ourselves, because of our many sins; now, all such dread has gone, and we look to sit upon the magisterial bench ourselves in the approaching day of earthly governmental glory.

The visions of the book of Daniel do not carry us beyond this point. For the many blessings of the kingdom we have to look elsewhere in the Word of God. Our prophet is taken up entirely with the supremacy and failure of the Gentiles, and their supersession at the end by the kingdom of the Son of man, who is withal the Ancient of Days (vv. 13, 22). In His day will be seen perfection of kingly rule. Earth's groan, prolonged for ages, will then be hushed. Peace and glory will fill the whole fair scene.



Prophecy in Picture.

No book of Holy Scripture has been more seriously assailed in recent years than the book of Daniel. Its antagonists have endeavoured to prove on the one hand that the man never existed, and on the other, that whoever wrote the book must have done so considerably later than the times of Nebuchadnezzar and his immediate successors because of the lucid description in chapter xi. of events that happened in the second century B.C. It is sometimes said that Daniel has suffered more in the critics' den than ever he suffered in the lions' den. The statement is scarcely correct. Neither Daniel nor his book have suffered at all at the hands of the critics. Enemies of the Holy Scriptures may be likened to a man who, with clenched fists, angrily assails a wall. The fists will suffer undoubtedly, but the wall will remain intact, in spite of all the man's rage.

The book of Daniel contains two visions that were granted to Nebuchadnezzar, one relating to his exaltation (ii), and one to his downfall (iv.); three visions that were granted to Daniel himself (vii., viii., x-xii.); one revelation that was given to the prophet in answer to his supplications (ix); and four historical incidents (iii., iv., v., vi.). For our present purpose

we leave aside chap. i. as just an introduction to the book as a whole.

Let us glance briefly at the historical incidents. Has it occurred to our readers that they are as truly prophetic in their teaching as the visions of chap. ii., etc., and the revelation of chap. ix? The historical chapters of Isaiah (xxxvi-xxxix) are also remarkably prophetic in their bearing. The contents of the historical chapters of Daniel may be described thus: in chap. iii. we have the Gentile head seeking to force idolatry upon his subjects; in chap. iv. we have the supreme ruler changed into a wild beast; in chap. v. Belshazzar blasphemously defies God and is promptly destroyed; and in chap. vi. Darius actually steps into the Creator's place by forbidding prayer to anyone but himself. Who, that knows anything of the prophetic word can fail to see in these doings dark foreshadowings of the future? The Spirit of God, who alone knows the end from the beginning, thus shows us in the first days of Gentile supremacy what will be enacted in the last days thereof.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

It is not a little remarkable that soon after his vision of the great image, with its head of gold, arms of silver, etc., Nebuchadnezzar should have set up an image of gold in the plain of Dura, with the decree that all should fall down and worship it. Is it possible that in his hardness of heart the vision suggested to his mind this great sin? He probably felt that unity in religion would be more likely to weld together into one the diverse races under his

sceptre than any other device. Is it not significant that the whole trend of things in our own time is in the direction of a common religion? Sir A. Conan Doyle, for example, claims that Spiritualism (he really means Spiritism) provides a platform upon which Jews, Christians, Mohammedans, and all others may meet in concord. **It is certain that the last head of Gentile power will do exactly what the first Gentile head attempted.** Rev. xiii. shows this clearly. Woe to the godly in those days! The flames of persecution will blaze out then more fiercely than ever before. But He who cared for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego twenty-five centuries ago will know how to strengthen similar faithful witnesses in the last dread crisis.

Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent lunacy appears to have led to his conversion to God. It seems almost impossible that such a proclamation as that in Dan. iv. should have been published by him otherwise. No subjects of any Empire have even been addressed as the peoples under the rule of Babylon were addressed by their sovereign when his reason was restored to him. The particular form that his aberration took was this:—he imagined himself a beast, and for seven years he lived in the fields as such. We need not travel beyond Daniel's book to learn that Gentile rule is just bestial in the Divine sight. The same powers that were shown to Nebuchadnezzar as metals in chap. ii. were shown to David as wild beasts in chap. vii. Rev. xiii., xvii., referring distinctly to the time of the end, confirm this. The last great united monarchy of Christendom is spoken of as a beast out of the sea, and out of the abyss. The symbol means that Gentile power, and especially in its last phase, is absolutely conscienceless and godless.

BELSHAZZAR.

Belshazzar's feast carries us a long step further. In him we see open defiance of the Most High. "They brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them." This was wanton devilry. Filled with pride, the drunken king thus expressed his enmity to, and contempt of, the Creator. The challenge was speedily taken up, and the insolent foe found himself launched into a lost eternity. Belshazzar's wickedness will be repeated by the last head of Gentile power. Compare Rev. xiii. 6: "he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven." At that awful time Rom. xiii. i. will cease to be true, for the supreme ruler will receive his throne and authority from the Dragon.

DARIUS.

Darius was personally a well-intentioned man, but he suffered himself to be ensnared by flatterers into a very serious position in relation to God. He signed a decree that whosoever should ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of himself, should be cast into the den of lions. This was stepping into God's own place. The last head of Gentile power will do this openly. MAN will be worshipped, and God will be formally and officially abjured! Awful climax of human iniquity!

The present age will thus end in appalling darkness and evil, with swift and overwhelming judgment from God. Man has been tried and proved in every way in amazing forbearance and goodness, and this is the final result. It is a truly humiliating thought for both reader and writer that flesh is hopelessly and incurably evil. None of us are one whit better than Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, or any other. If we discover within ourselves some delight in God, and a desire to do His will, God has put it there. "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. xv. 10).

The prophetic word presents to our souls two things:—(1) that man in power is an utter failure, and (2) that Christ alone can be safely entrusted with the reins of government. Presently He will take up His purposed administration, and will "put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. xv. 24). The issue of His stewardship will be an orderly universe for ever—"God all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 28).

