

CHAPTER THREE

The Four Beasts

We find the vision of the four beasts in the seventh chapter of Daniel. This time it is Daniel himself who dreams the dream. In awe-inspiring language he describes the beasts rising out of the ‘sea’ of humanity.¹

‘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. Daniel said, “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.”’
(Daniel 7:1-3)

The first beast

‘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.’ (Daniel 7:4)

The winged lion is familiar in Babylonian art. The eagle was a symbol of swiftness and the lion one of strength and nobility (II Samuel 1:23). The eagle was the king of birds, and the lion the king of beasts. They correspond to the image’s head of gold, the metal which was regarded as the noblest and most valuable of all metals. Almost all are agreed that this beast represents Babylon and that the change which comes upon it probably symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar’s madness and subsequent restoration (Daniel 4). Note that again Babylon *in the time of Nebuchadnezzar* is strongly indicated. The Bible repeatedly describes Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans of his time as being like both an eagle² and a lion.³ These creatures were used to convey a picture of Nebuchadnezzar coming from afar against the Jews and their neighbours, and carrying them off as captives to Babylon. The book of Daniel always associates the glory and magnificence of Babylon with *Nebuchadnezzar*, and it emphasizes his greatness again and again.⁴

It is a historical fact that Nebuchadnezzar was largely responsible for the glory of the neo-Babylonian empire. He came to the throne when his father died in 605 B.C., soon after the final obliteration of Assyria — an event which Nebuchadnezzar helped to bring about. During his long reign of 43 years, Babylon was practically invincible. Moreover he lavished immense wealth and architectural skill on his capital city, making it world-famous for its magnificence and strength. Nebuchadnezzar was both a great soldier and a great builder. After his death, however, a series of relatively weak kings followed each other in rapid succession and Babylon’s power declined. She was still a power, but whereas she formerly had the edge on her great rival, Media, the position was now reversed.

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.”’
(Daniel 7:5)

Although the bear is not so swift as the lion, it was equally feared owing to its great strength and the unpredictability of its actions. The lion and bear are mentioned together a number of times in Scripture,⁵ and both were clearly objects of special fear and respect. In a similar way the rival powers of Babylon and Media together commanded the nations’ fear and respect.

The bear is a comparatively slow-moving and clumsy creature; therefore this symbol applies better to the Median empire than to the Persian. The career of Cyrus the Persian was characterized by a succession of swift and brilliant victories, better symbolized by the next beast, which is a leopard.

We are told that the bear ‘was raised up on one side’. This may mean that one side was higher than the other as it stood on all fours. Or it could mean that one forepaw was raised off the ground as if it were in the act of raising itself up into a standing position on its hind legs. If the latter is what Daniel means, the figure could symbolize a nation rousing itself for conquest. The beast could be raising itself in response to the command ‘Arise, devour much flesh’; but it is not ready yet. This is a good picture of Media, because although she began to *prepare* for Babylon’s conquest, she never completed the task by herself. She did take part in the final destruction of Babylon, but only as the partner (and the inferior one at that) of Persia.

However, the main explanation of the bear’s attitude is this. *Media’s period of power was divided into two very different stages.* During the first stage she was the powerful head of a large empire — this is represented by the side of the bear which is raised up. During the second stage she was the somewhat inferior partner of Persia. Daniel is careful to emphasize (chapters 5, 6 and 8) that the Medes and Persians *ruled together as allies* for a number of years following Cyrus’ victory over the Median king in 550 B.C. This part of Media’s reign is represented by the lower side of the bear. During her partnership with Persia, she was still ruling the nations, but in a humbler capacity than before. Her partnership with Persia constituted the world’s most powerful empire; but despite the exalted nature of her continued ruling of the nations, it was not as exalted as it had been before the rise of Persia.

We are told that three ribs were in the bear’s mouth between its teeth, and that it was commanded, ‘Arise, devour much flesh’. These points seem to have caused a certain amount of confusion among interpreters; but in actual fact they provide very strong evidence that the bear symbolizes Media. It is generally agreed that the three ribs must represent three nations conquered by the bear, and that the bear is ordered to arise and make fresh conquests. However, the identities of the three nations have remained in doubt. The Bible itself provides the answer. In the book of Jeremiah we read the following words directed against Babylon:

‘Set up a standard on the earth, blow the trumpet among the nations; prepare the nations for war against her, summon against her the kingdoms, Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz; appoint a marshal against her, bring up horses like bristling locusts. Prepare the nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion. The land trembles and writhes in pain, for the Lord’s purposes against Babylon stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant.’ (Jeremiah 51:27-29)

In this passage God stirs up four nations against Babylon. This reminds us that the bear with the three ribs was also stirred up — and probably against Babylon. Three of these nations were the small kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. They all lay to the north of Babylon and *all were within the Median empire.* The fourth nation was the Median empire itself. *The bear with the three ribs between its teeth is a perfect picture of the Median empire and the three small subject kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz.* Note that *Media* is the principal nation stirred up against Babylon, and note also the following verses concerning Babylon:

‘The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it ...’ (Jeremiah 51:11)

‘Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them ...’ (Isaiah 13:17)

We can see, therefore, that the prophets repeatedly proclaimed *God would stir up the Medes*

against Babylon. This is the meaning of the command to arise and devour much flesh.

In Isaiah 21:2 Media and Elam are ordered to besiege Babylon and in verse 9 the fall of Babylon is proclaimed (prophetically). By the time Media got round actually to besieging Babylon, it had become the inferior partner of Persia. The reference to Elam is explained by the fact that Anshan, the small Persian kingdom where Cyrus first came to power, was situated in the eastern part of ancient Elam. It is also relevant, perhaps, that Gobryas, the general who captured the city of Babylon, was the governor of Elam (i.e., the western, Babylonian part) before he deserted to Cyrus.

Thus the general picture we have is that Media became stronger than Babylon on the death of Nebuchadnezzar and *planned* to overcome her, being stirred up to this by God. But before Media was able to carry her plans into effect, she was joined and surpassed by Persia. Under the leadership of Cyrus the Persian, however, she was able to take part in the eventual overthrow of Babylon.

There is a significant omission from the prophecies concerning the stirring up of Media against Babylon. Ararat, Minni, Ashkenaz and Media were all near to Babylonia, being ranged round its northern and eastern borders. Persian-occupied eastern Elam was also on the border of Babylonia, being just to the south of Media. Since eastern Elam (i.e., Persia) was, like the three other small kingdoms, subject to Media, it might be expected that it also would have been 'stirred up' against Babylon during the time of the latter's decay and Media's ascendancy. The reason for its omission is the fact that Babylon and Persia arranged an alliance together against Media. This was the situation during Media's period of supreme power; but it was reversed when Cyrus overcame the Median king, because the combination of Persia and Media was now the principal threat to Babylon.

The third beast

'After this I looked, and lo, another, like the leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back; and the beast had four heads; and dominion was given to it.' (Daniel 7:6)

The swift and agile winged leopard contrasts vividly with the clumsy, lop-sided bear. Such was the contrast between the ponderous Median empire and the brilliant, swiftly-moving armies of Cyrus the Persian. The early kings that followed Cyrus were not as brilliant as he, but they certainly moved much faster and more purposefully than the Medes.

Now the main characteristic of this third kingdom is, like that of the 'bronze' kingdom, one of widespread authority or 'dominion', which was the chief characteristic of Persia. This is shown by the four wings symbolizing the four winds, one for each of the 'four corners of the earth'.⁶ On a clay cylinder Cyrus, founder of the Persian empire, described himself as 'king of the four corners of the earth'. On another he said, 'Sin, the light of heaven gave into my hands the four corners of the earth'.

There is a famous four-winged figure on the door-jamb of one of the entrances to Cyrus' palace at Pasargadae, in Persia. It bore his name, but possibly represented a protective genius. Besides the four wings on its back, the figure has what appear to be two horns protruding from its head. In Daniel 8 the Persian empire is represented as a two-horned ram, the horns symbolizing the Median and Persian elements of that empire. There may be no connection, but it is interesting to imagine that through the centuries God may have preserved this lonely, silent monument as a guide to the meaning of Daniel's prophecy.

The beast had four heads. Now a head naturally suggests a king or some similar authority. In the eleventh chapter of Daniel we are specially told about *four kings of Persia*. The first is Cyrus and the fourth is Xerxes. This interpretation of the meaning of the four heads is

eminently suitable, because Persia's main period of expansion and aggression only covered the reigns of these first four kings — Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes (Pseudo-Smerdis being merely a short-lived impostor). Between them, these four kings created the Persian empire in all its vast extent and wealth; and it was after the reign of Xerxes that the decline of the empire began. Xerxes' small gains in Greece were lost within a few months; but the empire reached the pinnacle of its power, wealth and size during his reign. Each one of these four kings had a part to play in the creation of this enormous empire. It was not the work of one man, and the four-headed beast is a perfect picture of this.

We can see therefore that whatever resemblance the beast might have to any other empire, it was fulfilled *in every respect* by the Persian empire. Let it again be pointed out that the only thing said about the beast's rule was the fact that it was to have *dominion* — which corresponds to the statement that the bronze kingdom was to 'rule over all the earth'. This was by far the most striking aspect of the Persian empire. It was several times the size of any previous empire. The Greek empire, on the other hand, was no larger than the Persian, and was probably in fact slightly smaller. Moreover the Persians maintained their vast empire for over two hundred years, whereas the Greek empire was broken up and reduced in size only nine years after its foundation.

The fourth beast

'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' (Daniel 7: 7)

'Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrible, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze; and which devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet' (Daniel 7:19)

'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces' (Daniel 7:23)

The remarks made about the legs of iron in the first vision apply also to this fourth beast. It is not likened to any known animal. In strength, ferocity and probably speed it exceeded anything the orient could imagine. From the distant west Alexander descended on the east like a thunderclap, shattering the armies of earth's mightiest empire with a speed and thoroughness the world had never witnessed before. The verses quoted above convey very vividly the sense of terror which struck the east when the powerful city of Tyre fell to Alexander in 332 B.C. (see Ezekiel 26:15-21).

The fourth beast is said to be 'different' from the first three beasts. The western nation of Greece was a complete contrast to the oriental Babylonian, Median and Persian empires. Her culture was alien and her method of fighting also was completely different, enabling her with small armies easily to defeat the vast but unwieldy hosts of the east.

Rome, on the other hand, was in many respects very similar to Greece. She was a western power of the same racial stock and the same culture and her fighting methods were similarly efficient. In this respect, therefore, Greece fits the fourth beast much better than Rome.

We are told that the fourth kingdom treads down *'the whole earth'* and we are given the impression that it crushes the first three kingdoms (2:40; 7:7, 23). In the context of the book of Daniel, 'the whole earth' must surely include the area covered by the Babylonian, Median, Persian and Greek empires — an area which completely swamped the tiny land of Israel. In

this respect Greece would appear to be far more suitable than Rome. It will be remembered that like the fourth kingdom, the third kingdom also rules over ‘all the earth’. Now apart from some border areas, Greece took over the whole Persian empire, lock, stock and barrel — including Babylonia and Media. Thus the third and fourth kingdoms both rule over ‘the whole earth’; and regarding this, we note that Greece ruled over almost the same vast area as Persia.

Rome, on the other hand, did not by any means tread down ‘the whole earth’ in this context. The Roman empire was essentially an empire of the west and Palestine lay right on its eastern border. All the land to the immediate east of Palestine (including Babylonia, Media and Persia) lay *outside the Roman empire*. Trajan did incorporate Armenia, Mesopotamia and Assyria (the names given to the new provinces) into the Roman empire for a very short period in the second century A.D.; but his successor Hadrian immediately abandoned them. Later emperors had to annex territory in the east at various times in efforts to find a satisfactory frontier, but the empire reached its greatest extent during the reign of Trajan — long after the coming of the kingdom of Heaven. Most of the Median empire and about half of the Persian and Greek empires were never at any time within the Roman empire. Media and Persia themselves were never within the empire. Thus *in this context* Rome cannot be said to have trodden down ‘the whole earth’.

The horns of the fourth beast

‘... 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.’ (Daniel 7:7, 8)

‘... and concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up and before which three of them fell, the horn which had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and which seemed greater than its fellows. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them.’ (Daniel 7:20, 21)

‘As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time.’ (Daniel 7:24, 25)

The identities of the ten horns and the little horn have been the subject of much controversy. They probably occur during a second phase of the beast’s rule and correspond to the image’s feet of iron and clay. The number ten should be taken literally in view of the fact that the four horns of the he-goat (chapter 8) literally symbolize four kingdoms. Now the ten kings are *not* necessarily contemporaneous. Compare the image’s four metals which all appeared together and yet were essentially consecutive — likewise the heads of the third beast and the one-sided raising of the second beast. If the horns collectively represent a second phase of the beast’s rule, it is appropriate that they should appear together — even if they represent kings that are consecutive rather than contemporaneous.

A very reasonable and logical interpretation is that the first seven horns represent the seven Seleucid kings (the dynasty set up over the Syrian part of the empire after the death of Alexander and minutely described in Daniel 11) from Seleucus Nicator to Seleucus Philopater. Antiochus Epiphanes became king not long after the death of his brother Philopater, but his rise to power involved the disposal of three people. They were:

1. *Demetrius*, son of Philopater and rightful heir to the throne, who was sent to Rome by his

father as a hostage in return for Antiochus. He later returned to Syria and became its king after Antiochus had died, Antiochus having usurped the kingdom in his absence.

2. *Heliodorus*, the king's minister, who poisoned Seleucus Philopator when he saw that Demetrius, the heir, was out of the way and himself usurped the kingdom.

3. *Antiochus*, baby son of Philopator. Antiochus Epiphanes reigned with him (after Heliodorus had been disposed of) until the child was murdered after five years.

The manner in which Antiochus Epiphanes displaced these three kings is very aptly pictured by the little horn arising among three horns and plucking them up by the roots. There are many who feel that this interpretation is not entirely satisfactory, because Demetrius, Heliodorus and Antiochus were not 'kings' in quite the same sense as their seven predecessors. It is probable, however, that the tearing up of these three horns by the roots indicates the very fact that they did not attain the degree of kingship enjoyed by the first seven kings. Another objection is that Heliodorus was not a Seleucid by descent. This does not matter at all, since the vision merely indicates that the ten kings were of Greek origin.

However, it is true that there is some uncertainty about the identity of these last three kings. This uncertainty has enabled orthodox interpreters to maintain that the three horns cannot be identified and that the fourth beast therefore has nothing to do with Greece. Surely they are dismissing the matter too lightly. The solution outlined above is perfectly adequate in spite of the objections raised against it. The fact that some interpreters prefer other solutions does not negate the fact that at least one good solution does exist. It is a historical fact that there were *seven* Seleucid kings before Antiochus Epiphanes appeared on the scene, and that *three* more individuals stood in his path to the throne. Each of these three could in some way lay claim to the description of 'king'. This combination of circumstances was very distinctive and probably even unique. It is really too much to say that it is all a pure coincidence, especially when one takes into account the fact that the Greek empire is one of the two chief candidates for identification with the beast — also the fact that the Greek empire, the majority of the ten kings and Antiochus Epiphanes are all described minutely in chapters 8 and 11.

We may now consider the little horn. It need hardly be said that the description of this horn is a perfect description of Antiochus Epiphanes. It is said at first to be 'little', but later we are told that it is 'greater' than its fellows. In other words, from small beginnings it becomes great. Antiochus started his career as the younger brother of Seleucus Philopator, with no right to the throne, a hostage in Rome. From these small beginnings he became, as we are told in Daniel 8:9, 'exceedingly great'. The eyes refer perhaps to his cunning and vigilance. The mouth speaking great things, words against the Most High, refers to his boastful and blasphemous opposition to the God of Israel. He affected the title of *Theos Epiphanes*, 'God Manifest', as he looked on himself as an incarnate manifestation of Olympian Zeus.

We are told that the little horn makes war with the saints and prevails against them and thinks to change the times and the law. Antiochus savagely persecuted the faithful of Israel and abolished and sought to stamp out Judaism. He did all in his power to put down the temple ritual, the sacred scriptures, the Sabbath and other festival days, the food laws and the rite of circumcision.

We are told that the times and the law are 'given into its (the little horn's) hand till a time, and times, and a division of a time' — that is, 'three times and a fraction of a time'. (See A.V. and Young's Literal Translation. 'Half' in the R.S.V. is a translation of *pelag* which merely indicates a division, and does not necessarily mean a half.) Revelation 12 indicates that this 'time' is a year of 360 days.⁷ Thus certain ordinances are given into the hand of the little horn for three years and part of a year. In 167 B.C. Antiochus ordered the daily sacrifice and other

Jewish observances to cease.⁸ They came to an end probably around the middle of that year, though this could have occurred more towards the end of the year. Later, in December (15th Kislev), he erected an altar to Olympian Zeus in the temple court. Exactly three years after the commencement of the pagan sacrifices (25th Kislev, 164 B.C.), the victorious Jews recommenced the daily sacrifice, having removed the false high priest installed by Antiochus. Thus ‘the times and the law’ were indeed given into the hand of Antiochus for three years plus part of a year. We shall see, when we come to Daniel 12, that this was probably a period of 1290 days.

The destruction of the fourth beast and the rise of the kingdom of heaven

‘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.’ (Daniel 7:9-12)

‘I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a 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.’ (Daniel 7:13, 14)

Daniel’s informant explains,

‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever.’ (Daniel 7:17, 18)

Daniel states further that the little horn

‘... made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom.’ (Daniel 7:21, 22)

Daniel’s informant explains further,

‘But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.’ (Daniel 7:26, 27)

These passages describe the destruction of the fourth beast and the rise of the kingdom of Heaven. Now there are three very definite stages in this drama. Moreover the language precludes the possibility of their occurring instantaneously — they cover a period of time.

Stage 1. The fourth beast and the little horn are judged by the Ancient of Days and the saints are vindicated. Therefore the beast and the little horn are slain — the saints perhaps being instrumental in the execution of judgment.

Stage 2. The body of the fourth beast is then destroyed. Although the other three kingdoms have their authority taken from them, they are not yet destroyed.

Stage 3. The time then comes that ‘one like a son of man’ is brought before the Ancient of Days and is given dominion and glory and an everlasting kingdom.

We should try now to identify the new characters in the vision. The ‘Ancient of Days’ is God Himself — that is, God the Father; and a ‘saint’ is a true and faithful servant of God. The ‘one like a son of man’ is unquestionably Jesus Christ Himself, although he is perhaps to some extent identified with the saints (vv.18, 27).⁹ Jesus constantly referred to Himself as the ‘Son of man’ in terms which were obviously connected with Daniel 7:13. For example, He said to the High Priest, ‘Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’ (Matthew 26:64).

It is likewise just as unquestionable that He received His kingdom when He ascended up to Heaven after His work on earth was finished. The parable of a nobleman going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom was a parable of this event and the return of the nobleman pictures the second advent (Luke 19:12-27).

‘Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.’ (Matthew 16:28; see also Matthew 10:23)

‘But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ (Matthew 26:64)

‘But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’ (Luke 22:69)

‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’ (Matthew 28:18)

‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.’ (Acts 7:56)

‘... which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet ...’ (Ephesians 1:20-22)

‘When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high ...’ (Hebrews 1:3)

‘... Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.’ (I Peter 3:21, 22)

‘... she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne ...’ (Revelation 12:5)

‘... Jesus Christ ... the ruler of kings on earth.’ (Revelation 1:5)

‘He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.’ (Revelation 3:21)

‘... thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever.’ (Revelation 5:9-13, R.V.)

‘But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign

until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. “For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.”.... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.’ (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

These wonderful passages indicate clearly that Christ ‘received the kingdom’ at the time of His resurrection and ascension. This rules out the possibility of the fourth kingdom being Rome, because Daniel plainly shows that the fourth kingdom and the little horn would first be completely destroyed and *after that* the Son of man would receive His kingdom.

Having seen how this part of the vision does *not* apply to the destruction of the Roman empire, let us see how it *does* apply to the destruction of the Greek empire. But before we do this we need to define rather more precisely what the fourth beast symbolizes. We have seen that the fourth beast was killed *after* the little horn had been persecuting the saints for a period of time. If we regard the beast as symbolizing the whole Greek empire, including Macedon and Egypt, we run into difficulty, because Rome conquered Macedon before Antiochus began persecuting the Jews in earnest. This difficulty disappears immediately when we recognize the obvious, namely, that the beast represents the *Syrian* part of the Greek empire. It includes the empire of Alexander, but following his death, Macedon and Egypt drop away out of sight, and Syria is pictured as the continuation of the empire. This is reasonable, because 1) the Syrian empire (and it *was* an empire) was the largest of the three, 2) it was the one which came to rule over the Jews and affected them most profoundly and 3) by virtue of its geographical location it was the successor of the Babylonian, Median and Persian empires. Bearing this in mind, we may now see how the three stages outlined earlier were fulfilled.

Stage 1. Judgment is passed upon the Syrian Greek empire and Antiochus. Faithful Jews, enabled by God and inspired by loyalty to their religion, rebel successfully against their Greek rulers and so deal a death blow to the Syrian Greek empire. At about the same time Antiochus is struck down by the hand of God, through a mysterious illness. (Note that these facts also explain the striking of the image on its feet of iron and clay by the stone. We shall see in the next chapter that 8:25 indicates clearly that Antiochus Epiphanes was struck down by the hand of God, and the wording of that verse links it closely to 2:34).

Stage 2. In time, Rome appears on the scene and annexes the Syrian empire. Thus is the ‘body’ of the beast destroyed (7:11). *Babylon, Media and Persia, however, all lie outside the borders of the Roman empire.* They are deprived of their authority, but they are independent of Rome. Thus is fulfilled the prediction, ‘As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time’ (7:12). We shall see later that these events are described in a very remarkable way in Daniel 11:40-45.

Stage 3. Christ performs His work on earth and then returns to Heaven to receive again dominion and glory, and the kingdom. The kingdom is inherited also by His ‘body’, the church, which is composed of His ‘fellow heirs’, the saints (Ephesians 1:18 — 2:6; Romans 8:16, 17).

‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people..’ (I Peter 2:9)

‘... Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father ...’ (Revelation 1:5, 6)

‘... thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth.’ (Revelation 5:9, 10, R.V.)¹⁰

We shall see later that these are not the only places in the book of Revelation where we are told that the saints are even now reigning with Christ (Revelation 20:4-6). At this point let us turn briefly to Matthew 24:30, 31 where Christ appears to speak of the second advent and in doing so identifies himself as the ‘one like a son of man’.

‘... then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.’ (Matthew 24:30, 31)

As in the case of the stone, it may be contended that Christ was speaking of the event in Daniel, which must therefore be identified as a picture of the second advent. However, as in the case of the stone, this is not necessarily so at all. Christ was certainly identifying Himself as the ‘one like a son of man’ by using language similar to that of Daniel, but He is not necessarily speaking of the same event (assuming He is referring to the second advent), as can be seen by simple comparison. In Daniel’s vision it is a heavenly (and therefore pictorially represented) scene in which Christ is brought before the Ancient of Days and is given dominion and glory. At the second advent, however, Christ will be literally and visibly appearing in the clouds of heaven, and He will be coming to meet His saints on earth. He will not, at that time, be brought before the Ancient of Days to be given dominion and glory, because He is already at the right hand of Power. The latter is shown by Matthew 26:64 and Luke 22:69.

‘But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ (Matthew 26:64)

‘But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’ (Luke 22:69)

Both passages record Christ’s words to the Sanhedrin shortly before His crucifixion, and they are a clear allusion to Daniel 7:13, 14. The Greek *ap arti*, translated ‘hereafter’, means ‘from now’. On this occasion, therefore, Christ did not identify the scene in Daniel’s vision as that of the second advent. He clearly identified it as the scene of His triumphal return to Heaven following the crucifixion and resurrection. At the second advent, Jesus will come in the glory which He has possessed since the time of the first advent.

We should add here a word of clarification about the symbolical nature of the language in these verses. When Jesus said, ‘Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’, He did not of course mean that the Jews (of that time) would literally see Him thus with their physical eyes. Jesus is not seated on a literal, physical throne, and neither did He come to the Father on literal, physical clouds. The language employed is the ‘technical language of prophecy’, and is clearly symbolical. The clouds and the implied throne convey the idea of Christ’s elevation to power and glory, but they are not meant to be taken literally, any more than the four beasts are. Jesus was simply saying that the Jews would see the *evidence* of His exaltation and power (particularly, perhaps, in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.).

At this point we must return briefly to Matthew 24:30. We assumed above that this refers to the second advent. In fact, however, there are good reasons for believing that Jesus used Daniel 7:13, 14 *in its original sense* there, just as He did in Matthew 26:64. R. T. France argues convincingly that in Matthew 24:30 (or the parallel Mark 13:26) Jesus was not referring to the second advent — He was referring to the glorification and vindication which followed His resurrection.¹¹ The context indicates that Jesus could have been saying that He

would be vindicated and His power revealed by the destruction of the Jewish nation in 70 A.D. In that case we should read, ‘then all the tribes of the *land* will mourn’. The ‘sign of the Son of man in heaven’ — that is, the sign of Christ’s exaltation and power — was His destruction of the nation in 70 A.D. Further on in this book we shall see how immensely important the events of 70 A.D. are in both the prophecies of Daniel and the teaching of Jesus.

This interpretation of Matthew 24:30 makes obvious sense of Christ’s words in verse 34 — ‘Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.’ Compare Matthew 16:28 — ‘Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.’ Some readers may find this interpretation of Matthew 24:30 difficult to accept; but the meaning of Matthew 16:28 and 26:64 is perfectly plain. In those verses Jesus clearly applied Daniel 7:13, 14 to His own exaltation following His resurrection and ascension.

Remember, however, what was said in the introductory chapter about ‘prophetic foreshortening’. Daniel’s vision of the ‘one like a son of man’ refers primarily to Christ’s first advent, but it looks beyond it to His second advent also. The vision does not distinguish between the two advents, because they are both parts of *one event* — namely, ‘the coming of the Son of man’. This event covers the whole period of ‘the time of the end’ or ‘the last days’. It began with the first advent, but it will be completed by the second advent.

The place of the Roman empire

Before going on, let us pause briefly to consider Rome’s place in the prophecies. I shall show that the Roman empire *has* a place in the prophecies’ fulfilment — but it is a secondary fulfilment. It is not the primary fulfilment imagined by orthodox and dispensationalist interpreters.

A strong clue can be found in the book of Revelation, chapter 13, where John describes a great beast.

‘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. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.’ (Revelation 13:1, 2)

It is obvious that this beast is a combination of the four beasts described in Daniel 7. Note that the four beasts had seven heads between them. The beast partakes of many of the characteristics of Daniel’s fourth beast, but it is a *composite* beast — it is not the same as the fourth beast.

Now the narrative indicates (as we shall see when we consider the matter more fully in our final chapter) that to some extent this beast symbolizes *the Roman empire*. But it also symbolizes other antichristian powers and organizations of the present age, including the last great ‘Antichrist’. Thus the four great heathen pre-Christian empires of Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece *collectively symbolize and foreshadow* the anti-Christian powers and organizations of this present age — particularly the Roman empire.

Summary

At this point let us look back over Daniel’s first two prophecies and summarize briefly. Both prophecies look forward to a heavenly, Messianic kingdom, and both indicate that this kingdom is to be preceded by four great earthly kingdoms. I have identified these four kingdoms as Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece, and I have done so for two main reasons: 1) The description of the four kingdoms is an exact description of Babylon, Media, Persia and

Greece. 2) The New Testament indicates that the heavenly kingdom of both visions is that which was established by Christ some two thousand years ago. The vision of the image indicates that Christ *began* the process of setting up the kingdom by destroying the fourth empire — the feet of iron and clay were broken *before* the stone became a mountain. And the vision of the four beasts indicates that the fourth empire was completely destroyed *before* Christ was glorified after His crucifixion and resurrection. It follows that the fourth empire cannot be the Roman empire. It must be the Greek empire.

However, lest we should still be unable to make up our minds, the book of Daniel now proceeds to name these empires by name — as we shall see in the next chapter.

-
1. Cf. Revelation 13:1; 17:3, 15.
 2. Deuteronomy 28:49-53 (cf. II Kings 25:1-11); Jeremiah 49:19, 22; Lamentations 4:19; Ezekiel 17:1-5, 11-14; Habakkuk 1:6-8.
 3. Isaiah 5:25-30; Jeremiah 4:6, 7, 13 (cf. 25:9, 38); 49:19, 22; 50:17, 44.
 4. Daniel 2:37, 38; 4:22, 30, 36; 5:18, 19.
 5. I Samuel 17:34; Proverbs 28:15; Lamentations 3:10; Amos 5:19.
 6. See Psalm 104:3 and Zechariah 2:6 — ‘the wings of the wind’ and ‘I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens’.
 7. In Revelation 12 a period of 1260 days is defined as being three and a half ‘times’ (vv. 6, 14) — the Greek word *hemisu* definitely meaning ‘half’ in that instance.
 8. 167 or 168 B.C. There is an uncertainty of one year with all dates in the Seleucid era; but this does not affect the interpretation of Daniel’s prophecies.
 9. See *Daniel’s Vision of the Son of Man*, by E. J. Young, (Tyndale Press, 1958). Young suggests that the saints receive the kingdom *from the Son of Man*. See also Ephesians 1:18 — 2:6; Revelation 5:9-13. Much has been written on this subject, but we cannot go into all the details here. For our purpose the important question is, how did *Jesus* interpret the vision? [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/daniel_young.pdf]
 10. The Revised Version follows the best manuscripts in translating ‘they reign upon the earth’, rather than ‘they shall reign on earth’.
 11. R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, (Tyndale Press, 1971). See section on ‘The Son of Man’ (pp. 135-148) and on Mark 13:24-27 (pp. 227-239). See also the section on Matthew 24 in the Tyndale commentary on *Matthew*, by R. V. G. Tasker.

© 1980, 2006 R.J.M. Gurney.

Revised and updated for the Web by the author.

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_god-in-control_gurney.html
