

“WALKING IN THE SHADOW OF THE ANTICHRIST”**The Beasts of Man’s Empires” (Daniel 7:1-8)**

The first six chapters of the Book of Daniel are mainly biographical and devotional. By contrast, the last six chapters have an entirely different focus. They record four visions given to Daniel in the last years of his life. Daniel had been a young man when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the image in Daniel 2 but he was now an old man. Nebuchadnezzar was dead and the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity are drawing to a close.

In Daniel 7-12 the Lord revealed four apocalyptic visions to Daniel of the future history of Israel and the future history of this world. He focused particularly on the Great Gentile Empires. There are many parallels with the Great Image in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 e.g. there are four parts to the image and then four beasts; and the destruction of the final part of the image and the final beast is by the coming of Christ. Daniel 7 builds upon the things that are revealed in Daniel 2 with new details revealed.

People have always been attracted to know what the future holds. The ancient Greek generals sought an audience with the oracle at Delphi to unfold coming events. Fortune-tellers make their fortune by such speculation. Because God is not constrained by time, as He created it, He can perfectly see the future as well as the present. The only way to know the future is to know the One who controls the future. Daniel 7 is a vital chapter to understand the future as revealed by a sovereign God. One writer summarized its importance,

In a word, Daniel 7 gives us God’s Blueprint for Bible Prophecy! When you get a good “hold” on Daniel 7, the truth of Daniel 7 will hold you when everything in the world seems to be falling apart! You can remain confident that because of God’s sovereignty over kings and kingdoms in the past, the present is not falling apart but in fact is coming together for the consummation of the ages the capstone event being the Second Coming of the King, Christ Jesus! Learn the “skeleton” truths of Daniel 7 and you will be able to put “meat” on the bones, for all other Bible prophecies of the end times fit into the framework of Daniel 7.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters. (v1)

The date of this dream is around 553 BC. This is approximately 14 years before the drunken feast of Belshazzar that ended the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC, which is recorded in Daniel 5. The new king Belshazzar had forgotten Daniel but the Lord had not. So, the chapters in the Book of Daniel do not always follow a chronological sequence. The four visions are dated approximately:

(i) AFTER DANIEL 4 BUT BEFORE DANIEL 5

Vision 1 (Daniel 7) - First year of King Belshazzar (553BC)

Vision 2 (Daniel 8) - Third year of King Belshazzar (551BC)

(ii) AFTER THE FALL OF BABYLON (539 BC) RECORDED IN DANIEL 5

Vision 3 (Daniel 9) - First year of Darius the Mede (538/539BC)


Vision 4 (Daniel 10) - Third year of Cyrus the Persian (535/536BC)

It is important to note that although these four visions are full of apocalyptic – even bizarre - symbols this does not render them meaningless. The signs and symbols point to something real.

Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. (v2-3)

Daniel saw four great beasts emerging from the sea. Likely, the raging sea is a symbol of the Gentile nations in their restless tossing to and fro from which these four great Gentile Empires will emerge. The four winds may well picture the Lord sovereignly directing the rise and fall of these Empires throughout time from the four corners of the earth. We are explicitly told that these beasts represent, “four kings, which shall arise out of the earth.” (v17) So each of the four beasts revealed to Daniel represent a king and thus a resulting kingdom. These kingdoms go from bad to worse. In Daniel 2 these kings and their empires were symbolized as metals – gold, silver, bronze, and iron but in Daniel 7 they are symbolized as beasts. Likely, this is because in Daniel 2 we see fallen man’s perspective of these empires as impressive, powerful, valuable, and attractive, whereas in Daniel 7 we see a holy God’s perspective on the same empires. The Lord sees beyond the outward superficiality that impresses us and sees them for who they really are – vicious, ruthless, destructive, bloody, and depraved. He doesn’t see anything attractive or valuable in them.

CHART OF PARALLELS BETWEEN DANIEL 2 & DANIEL 7

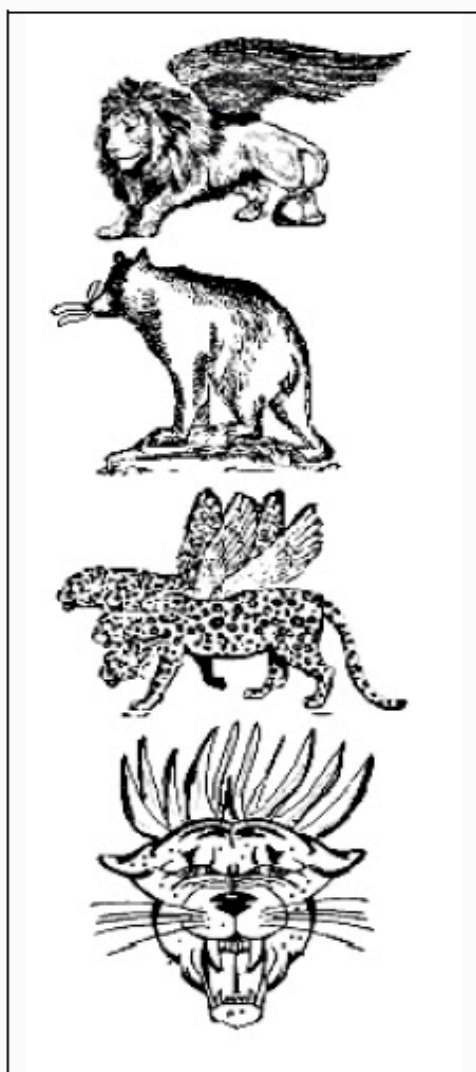
	Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Daniel 2)	Daniel's Dream (Daniel 7)	The Kingdoms Prophesied
	Gold (Head)	Lion	Babylonian
	Silver (Breast & Arms)	Bear	Medo-Persian
	Brass (Belly & Thighs)	Leopard	Greek
	Iron (Legs)	Beast with Iron Teeth	Roman
	Iron & Clay (Feet)	Ten Horns	Antichrist
	Stone	Son of Man	Jesus Christ

These Empires reflect the “Times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24), when Israel lost its central role in the world. Each empire replaces the other, which is a stark reminder of the temporal nature of man’s endeavours. This is true not just of these empires but also of the academic, business, and corporate world, “Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.” (Psa. 49:12)

BEAST ONE

The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. (v4)

The first beast is seemingly identical to the head of gold in the image in Daniel 2. Initially it had the wings of an eagle and then morphed into a human form. We know that the lion as the King of Beasts and the eagle as the King of the Birds symbolized royal power and majesty. Daniel 2 reveals that Nebuchadnezzar was the figure of "this head of gold" (2:38) and that God had given him, "a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." (2:37b) Jeremiah describes Nebuchadnezzar as a conquering lion, "The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant." (Jer. 4:7) and Ezekiel as a conquering eagle (Ezek. 17:3-7). Interestingly, archaeology reveals that one of the symbols of Babylon was a lion with eagle's wings. Statues of such beasts were placed at the gates of the city. The eventual humanizing of the image of the beast may represent the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar after he was humiliated to live like a beast for his pride in Daniel 4.

**Babylon (605-539 B.C.)**

Winged Lion—Majesty
Eagle Wings—Swiftness to Conquer
Lion and Eagle—King of Beasts

Medo-Persia (539-330 B.C.)

Bear—More Destructive than Lion
Raised Up—Lopsided Dualism
Ribs—Absorbed Cultures

Greece (330–63 B.C.)

Winged Leopard—Great Swiftmess
Four Heads—Alexander's Generals
Seleucus—Babylon
Ptolemy—Egypt
Cassander—Macedonia & Greece
Lysimachus—Trace & Asia Minor

Rome (63 B.C.–A.D. 1453)**Revived Roman Empire (?)**

Ten Horns of Revelation 13 & 17
Little Horn—The Antichrist

BEAST TWO

And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. (v5)

The second beast corresponds to the breast and arms of silver of the Daniel 2 image. Most bible scholars identify this bear with the Medo-Persian Empire. The fact that “*it raised up itself on one side*” may be an insight into the fact that the Persians dominated the union of the Medes and the Persians. The silver was a diminution of value from the gold and the symbol of a bear is certainly also less majestic than the symbol of the lion.

The bear is a ferocious and powerful beast but it was not as swift or glorious as the lion. However, it had the formidable force to devour other nations, which is pictured with the ribs of the prey in the bear’s mouth. Some commentators believe that the 3 ribs represent the 3 great preys devoured by the Medo-Persian Empire – Lydia (546 BC), Babylon (539 BC) and Egypt (525 BC). The Persians had large cumbersome armies (Xerxes had an army of 2,500,000 men to fight with Greece in the Persian Wars) that devoured its rivals like a large, lumbering bear. At its height the Persian Empire included more than 100 countries stretching from Afghanistan and India in the east to southern Ethiopia in the west. They built an empire by overwhelming force that was greater than any before it in human history.

BEAST THREE

After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. (v4)

The third beast is in the form of a leopard with four wings and four heads. The leopard is famed for its agility, cruelty, and speed. It often uses these strengths to surprise and trap its prey. The four wings add to the impression of great speed. Most commentators believe that this leopard symbolized the coming of the Greek Empire that was founded by Alexander the Great. He led his relatively small armies with legendary speed to conquer the known world faster than any of the preceding world empires, “*dominion was given to it.*” Daniel also predicted that in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the third kingdom of the Greeks, “*shall bear rule over all the earth.*” (2:39) Indeed, by the age of 32 Alexander ruled from Europe to India. His armies famously took revenge on the Persians and devoured their empire. Like a leopard Alexander sped through the Middle East with fast efficient attacks that took his rivals by surprise. He was undefeated in battle and is considered one of history’s most successful military commanders.

A surprising revelation was that, “*the beast had also four heads.*” Alexander died prematurely at 32 years of age in Babylon after his army refused to go any further East. When Alexander died suddenly in 323 B.C. his Empire was divided among his four generals – Lysimachus, Antipater, Ptolemy, and Seleucus. This division was also prophesied in Daniel 8 and 11 two centuries before it was fulfilled,

Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. (Daniel 8:8)

And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor

according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those. (Daniel 11:3-4)

BEAST FOUR

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse 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 little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things. (v7-8)

The fourth beast is radically different from the others, “and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it.” Unlike the other beasts, there was no point of reference in the animal world like a bear or a leopard to compare with. It is the most complex and the most difficult to fully interpret. This beast receives greater attention and is of the most interest to Daniel. The reference to “*iron teeth*” here clearly links this vision with that of Daniel 2, where the image had two iron legs. There is also the parallel of the ten toes in Daniel 2 and the ten horns in Daniel 7.

We have nothing here that can infallibly identify who this beast is. However, with the benefit of 2,500 years of subsequent world history, we now know that the Roman Empire devoured the Greek Empire. This iron beast represents the mighty Roman Empire. It crushed all before it and devoured them, “*dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it.*” So this beast is a remarkably accurate prediction of the rise and dominance of the Romans. As an Empire they inspired dread in other nations as that “*dreadful and terrible*” beast. In Daniel 2 the corresponding prophecy is remarkably similar, “*And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.*” (2:40)

The Roman Empire was the greatest in military strength, extent, and length. It emerged almost out of nowhere and crushed all resistance with its iron legs ruling from Britain to the Euphrates and from northern Europe to Africa. The Romans adopted the Latin phrase *imperium sine fine* (“empire without end”) to express their belief that neither time nor space limited the Empire. The iron heel of Rome was on the neck of this world for more than a millennium. In the West it existed for 500 years and all the way to 1453 in the East, when the Turks conquered Constantinople. Indeed, it lasted much longer than the others (almost eight times as long!).

TEN HORNS

The fourth beast is described as having ten horns, which we are explicitly told represents 10 kings, “*And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise.*” (v24a) Horns are representative of power so these are ten persons or kingdoms with authority. This division by potentially rival kings explains why the image of the ten toes that is described as a singular “*divided*” kingdom of iron and clay that is one that is “*partly strong, and partly broken.*” (2:41-42)

This is where this prophecy becomes problematic and controversial. For there is no record of the Roman Empire ever had any entities that can be naturally identified with the ten toes of Daniel 2 or the ten horns of Daniel 7 description (Rome was never divided into 10 parts and there were many more Caesars than 10!). Furthermore, we are told that Christ will return after the destruction of this final Gentile Empire to raise up His earthly kingdom. The Kingdom of Christ follows the final ruler of the final kingdom of the Gentile nations. So it is improbable

that this final Gentile kingdom of ten horns is the old Rome, which has crumbled centuries ago. Hence, many commentators believe that this kingdom of ten horns and ten toes is referring to a future kingdom of a kind of ten nation confederacy that is far removed from the other four Gentile superpower kingdoms. The transition from the legs of iron to the amalgam of iron and clay that make up the feet and toes is also suggestive that there has been a fundamental change from one type of government to another. Hence, another phase of the previous old Roman Empire has a future aspect to unfold. It has two distinct stages in history.

Then another radical transition occurs as Daniel reveals, *“I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.”* (v8) The ten horns then change from the picture of a semblance of unified power and a new feature appears. Suddenly, chaos erupts and a little horn springs up and uproots three of the ten previous horns, *“and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.”* (v24b) It may be that three obstructionist kings are struck down and then the remaining seven submit to the little horn. Therefore, seven horns of the original ten remain intact and the interloper little horn (the 11th horn) becomes prominent. We read that, *“And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows.”* (v20)

This little horn king who has eyes and speaks powerfully is thought to be the Antichrist, who will emerge from the chaos and upheaval of the final days of this age to bring a sense of forced unity. He will come from within the confederacy of ten rulers to dominate the rest. The fact that he is *“little horn”* at first may suggest that he comes from nowhere to dominate by the power of his political skills. We are told in other passages that he is a great flatterer and a diplomatic genius. This Antichrist will come initially by deception to seize power before using force and intimidation to extend his Empire worldwide. We will only be able to initially identify him when he subdues the three rival rulers. He will be the best tool Satan can produce of a false imitation of Jesus Christ! Daniel 7 just gives us an introduction to this unique ruler known as the Antichrist. In chapter 8 he is described as the, *“king of fierce countenance”* (8:23) and in chapter 9 as a prince that will *“confirm the covenant with many for one week”* (9:27) and in chapter 11 as a *“vile person.”* (11:21) When Daniel heard of the nature of this man, it is no wonder that he was *“grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.”* (v15)



LINK WITH REVELATION 13

Interestingly, the Antichrist is called a “*beast*” in Revelation 13 with ten horns that emerges out of the chaos of the Great Tribulation Period, “*And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.*” (Rev. 13:1) We are also told the nature of this beast is identified with all the characteristics of the first three beasts – lion, bear, and leopard of Daniel 7, “*And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.*” (Rev. 13:2) The Antichrist will be the embodiment of all the wickedness, guile, ruthlessness, and depravity of all those Gentile leaders that preceded him. He will utter great boasts and blasphemies against God, “*And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.*” (Rev. 13:5; cf. 2 Thess. 2:4) The Antichrist will achieve great world domination, “*and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.*” (Rev. 13:7)

IS THE EU THE ANTICHRIST EMPIRE?

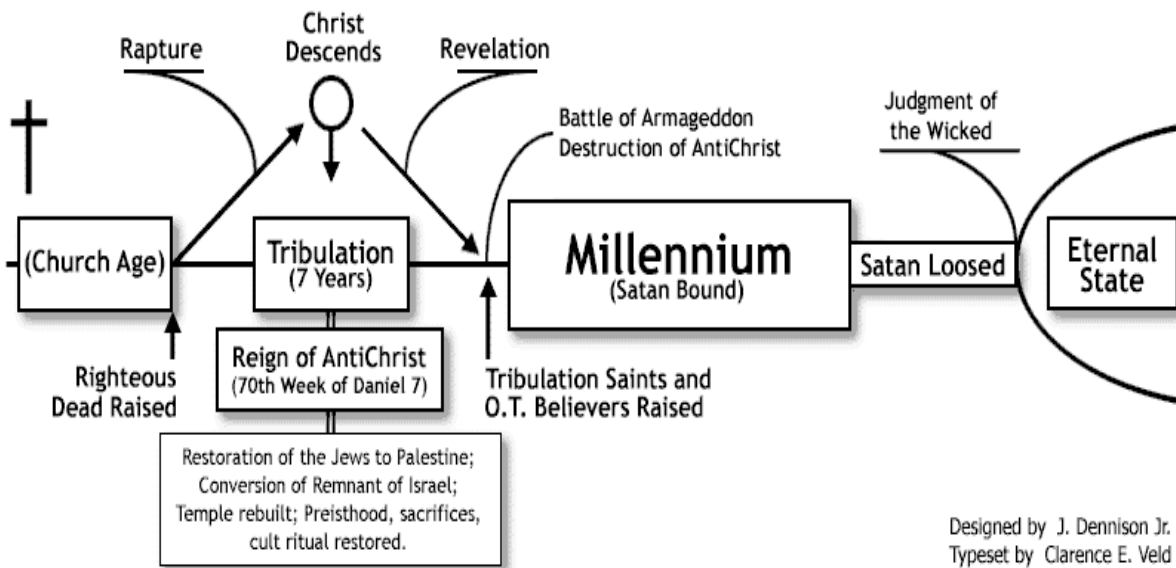
The fact that the ten horns/ten toes kingdom is closely identified with the iron legs in the image of the old Roman Empire has led many to argue that the Antichrist’s kingdom will emerge from the area associated with this previous regime. This resulted in much excited speculation in the late twentieth century with the establishment of the EEC or EU as a revived Roman Empire. However, that need not be. The Antichrist’s kingdom is a worldwide one and the ten horns/ten toes kingdom might reflect ten of the most powerful nations from over the face of the whole of the earth (including some of those from the old Roman Empire). This could be the G-10 countries just as easily as 10 EU nations! We have no need to expend hours trying to fill in the blanks that the Lord has chosen to leave such as who these 10 kings or rulers are. People engage in fanciful speculations on the basis of tenuous connections such as the identification of Russia with the bear, the UK with a lion, and the USA with the eagle. **The *how* or *who* or *what* or *when* this final kingdom will emerge we are not clearly told. Endless speculation never adds to certainty in God’s Word!**

CONCLUSION

Throughout the ages the devil has empowered deeply depraved individuals to engage in promoting evil in this world. This movement will culminate in the revealing of the “*man of sin*” (2 Thess. 2:3). Since the early days of Christianity, the Apostles taught from OT books, like Daniel 7, the coming of a great deceptive dictator known as the Antichrist, who will be the greatest copycat “Christ” the devil has ever produced. Scripture tells us much about him.

Eventually during the Great Tribulation Period the Antichrist will take absolute control as the “Dictator of all Dictators!” He as the devil incarnate will truly be of his father the devil! However, just as God revealed through Daniel that there would be four sequential empires – Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman – so we can have total confidence that the Lord will literally fulfill the prophecy of the ten kings and the coming Antichrist. The God who controlled the rise and fall of the original four Gentile empires will have no problem handling the rise and fall of the Antichrist empire. The best and worst is yet to come.

APPENDIX ONE



DANIEL'S "SEVENTY WEEKS"

DAN.9:24-27

