

*In the sci-fi thriller “Aliens” – the second movie, a marine rescue team from Earth faces off against hostile alien monsters that inflict serious carnage on the team. Amazingly, a small girl named “Newt” is discovered on the planet as the lone survivor of a prior colony. Well, after a particularly bad encounter with the aliens, Newt informs the civilian consultant for the team named Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver) that the team needs to quickly get back to a safe place. **But why?** Well, her reply is classic: “We better get back because it will be dark soon, and they mostly come at night ... mostly.”*

Newt was right. Monsters mostly come at night ... mostly. They come out at night when it’s dark. They come out at night when we lie in our beds, and they come out at night in our dreams while we sleep as the prophet Daniel will soon explain.

We are over the hump in the book of **Daniel**, and this morning as we move into the last half of this book, we are moving into a section where Daniel presents a series of prophetic visions concerning world history and what is to come.

Now, as I have said before, especially when we were studying the book of **Revelation**, I tend to take the Bible literally until it is clear it is not to be taken literally, and beginning with this chapter in **Daniel**, we will be working our way through some apocalyptic writing which is filled with all kinds of imagery that are clearly symbolic in nature. What Daniel gives us is somewhat challenging and mysterious, prompting all kinds of views, and this morning, as the opportunity presents itself, I will share two views with you – one of which is *historical* and the other which is *contemporary*.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Daniel 7** and we will begin with **verse 1** where Daniel has a flashback in time. We are told,

¹ In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. ² Daniel said, “I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

Back in the first year of the Babylonian king **Belshazzar** – before his party that God crashed – Daniel laid in his bed one night and he had a monstrous dream. In his dream he saw the **four winds of heaven** stirring up the **great sea**. Usually, the great sea would refer to the Mediterranean Sea which is the largest body of water in the region, but in this context, the great sea might be better understood as the “*sea of humanity*” referring to the people of the world, namely the Gentiles. So, the sea of humanity is being stirred up – there’s turmoil in it, and it’s God’s doing.

Daniel continues, and in **verse 3** he tells us that in his dream something comes out of the sea and it's not the little mermaid and her aquatic friends. He says,

And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.

We are told that out of this turbulent sea of humanity emerge **four great beasts** which are symbolic of kingdoms – shown to Daniel and described to us in terms that we can somewhat understand, and we know these beasts are symbolic of kingdoms because later in this chapter we are specifically told they are kings and kingdoms.

Now as I said earlier, I want to share two views with you concerning these great kingdoms or empires if you will, and generally speaking from a *historical* point of view – it is believed that these four great empires are the same four great empires described back in **Chapter 2**.

If you recall in that chapter, King Nebuchadnezzar had a reoccurring dream – an unsettling dream, and in his dream, the king saw this colossal and glorious statue of a man. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay like pottery. If you remember, Daniel interpreted the dream, explaining that this statue represented the four great Gentile empires who will rule the known world up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ – empires which will follow one another in succession beginning with the Babylonian Empire – the head of gold.

That was the dream of Nebuchadnezzar interpreted by Daniel. It was a dream from the perspective of man, and from man's perspective, these empires symbolized by this statue appeared awesome and wonderful, but here in **Chapter 7** – these same empires are described from God's perspective, and from His perspective, these empires look like beasts – they are monstrous.

So, from a *historical* point of view, the empires here in **Chapter 7** are the same empires in **Chapter 2** – just seen from a different perspective. Now from a *contemporary* point of view, it is suggested these empires portrayed as beasts are not the same empires in **Chapter 2**, and they do not follow each other in succession – instead, they are all present at the same time – at the end of time – just before the return of Jesus Christ. This idea comes from passages such as **verse 7** which reads,

After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

This is a reference by Daniel of the fourth beast, and if you notice on the last line, all the beasts were **before** it – before the fourth beast. That word **before** does not mean “*this before that*” as in chronological sequence, instead it refers to presence as in – “*standing before a superior.*” So, it’s from words like this that those with a *contemporary* view make their case, and just so you know, I spent two very frustrating days on this one word trying to make sense it, and in all honesty, it’s given me some cause for pause.

This is just a small example of some of the challenges with prophecy, but be that may, let’s take a look at these beasts starting with the first one in **verse 4**.

The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

According to Daniel, the first beast looked *like* a **lion** but it had eagle’s wings. From the *historical* point of view, this first beast represents the Babylonian Empire – consistent with the head of gold on the statue in **Chapter 2**, and also in the Bible, prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Habakkuk identify Babylon as both the lion and the eagle. What’s also interesting to note is that in archeological digs around the ruins of Babylon, they have found images of a lion with wings. This is an example of what appears to be the Babylonian national emblem.

Now, we are told that as Daniel watched, this lion had its wings **plucked**, and it stood up like a man and a human mind was given to it. Most conservative commentators say that this is a reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation where his pride caused him to think and to live like an animal for seven years, and afterwards, after finally giving glory to God, his sanity and his empire was restored to him.

So, according to those who take a *historical* view, this first beast is symbolic of the Babylonian Empire, but that doesn’t sit well with those who prescribe to a *contemporary* view because the prophetic timing seems way off, and let me explain. Jumping ahead to **verse 17**, we are told,

These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth.

These kings or kingdoms **will arise** – that’s future tense. When Daniel had his dream, the Babylonian Empire was already well established under Nebuchadnezzar and several Babylonian kings after him. **How can Daniel see this first beast as coming out of the sea – something apparently in the future, when the Babylonian Empire was already ruling the known world for quite some time?** It’s a problem, and therefore, it’s thought that this vision by Daniel pertains solely to the end time – our time, and the lion standing on two feet could be a nation like Great Britain who’s national symbol is a lion on two feet and the plucked eagle’s wings may represent a shift from their once great military power to an intellectual power, or to really hit home as some suggest, the eagle’s wings which are plucked could be America who gained independence from Great Britain and yet remains allied with them.

Something to think about, isn’t it? Anyway, let’s continue. Then, Daniel sees another beast, and in **verse 5** we are told,

And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, ‘Arise, devour much meat!’

From a *historical* point of view, consistent with the statue in **Chapter 2**, this **bear** is symbolic of the Medo-Persian Empire which followed behind the Babylonian Empire. Like a bear, the Medo-Persian Empire was ferocious and brutal, and with an army of 2 ½ million soldiers – it was overwhelming in power and crushing in their conquests. We are told this bear was **raised up on one side**, meaning that this union between the Medes and the Persians was unbalanced – dominated by the Persians who would eventually swallow up the Medes. As far as the **three ribs** in its mouth, it could simply represent their voracious appetite for conquest, or as many believe this is a reference to three of their great military campaigns over Babylon, Egypt, and Lydia – which is western Asia Minor.

That’s the *historical* view, **but what about the contemporary view?** Well, as you can probably guess, the **bear** may represent Russia who appears unapologetic when it comes to bloodshed and seems brazenly bent on the expansion of territory to reclaim its former glory as the mighty Soviet Union.

Now we come to the third beast. In **verse 6**, Daniel tells us,

After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

From a *historical* point of view, this third beast is symbolic of Grecian Empire under the command of Alexander the Great. Under his leadership, the Greek armies moved like lightening – they were very cunning and swift in their conquests, and even with smaller numbers, they defeated the mighty Persian army because God gave them **dominion**. By the age of 26, Alexander the Great ruled the known world but at the age of 33, he died a victim of his own miserable lusts. **So, what about the four wings and the four heads?** Well, upon Alexander's death – without an heir, the Grecian Empire was divided among the four leading generals.

Now with this one, the *contemporary* view gets crazy with all kinds of mind-numbing speculation. Some suggest this leopard with four heads and four wings is a confederation of Asian nations, others say it's a union of Middle Eastern powers who control oil and natural gas, some claim its Germany and France, while others suggest its China. Again, it's all wild speculation, and to me it feels like people are trying to force a square peg into a round hole to fit Daniel's prophecy. I don't want to do that, and I don't want to add to the confusion, so we'll just move on.

All of these beasts we have seen thus far we would call freaks of nature, but nothing is more freakish than the fourth one. Instead of comparing it to some known animal, Daniel simply called it a beast, but according to **Revelation 13:2**, it appears to be some sort of mongrel – composed of traits like a lion, like a bear, and like a leopard – in other words, this fourth empire combines the strength, the brutality, and the swiftness of the other three. This one should be of most interest to us – for it certainly was to Daniel, and it's here that I think the *historical* and the *contemporary* views converge.

Beginning with **verse 7** Daniel tells us,

⁷ After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

⁸ While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

This fourth beast is symbolic of the Roman Empire who followed in succession after the Greeks, and they were different from the rest in their strength, in their scope of dominion, and in their longevity of rule. They lasted longer than the other three combined. The Romans were dreadful and brutal and extremely powerful – and with its “*Iron Legions*” – corresponding with the legs of iron on the statue in **Chapter 2**, they smashed to pieces all who stood against them, they killed thousands upon thousands, and they sold hundreds of thousands into slavery.

Eventually, the empire crumbled from within due to corruption and immorality, but no world empire has ever taken its place. It did not disappear like the other empires – it just lost its dominion, which leads many to believe that still in the future, in a unique form, there will emerge a revived Roman Empire consistent with the last part of the statue in **Chapter 2**, where Daniel saw the feet of iron – symbolic of the Romans mixed with clay – presumably feet with ten toes.

This revived empire, is different from the others, even different from the old Roman Empire, because we are told it has **ten horns**, and in the Bible, horns are symbolic of power. Although the old Roman Empire had many providences under its rule, there is no record that there was a ten-part empire, and therefore, we must consider something occurring in the future – in the latter days – our days.

This revived Roman Empire may be in the form of a European union made up of a federation of ten nations, maybe there are ten economic regions in the world that unite together, or maybe there is another type of ten-part group, but whatever it is – it is symbolized by these ten horns of power.

Well, Daniel has more to tell us – and by pulling from the later verses in this chapter to fill in some of the details that Daniel asked for, we learn that out of these ten horns, **another horn**, an eleventh will come up from among them – he will overpower three of them, and he becomes the dominate force of this coalition.

This eleventh horn we know as the *Antichrist*. During the Tribulation period, he starts out small, he starts out as a peacemaker, he looks like a hero, and he rises up on the world stage and becomes more powerful than all the others – boastfully tooting his own horn and blaspheming God in the process. He will be empowered by Satan to do impressive works and wonders, and during the last three and half years of the Tribulation period, he will become a dictator – subduing the whole world, even declaring Himself – god. If you remember, *anti* means *against* but it also means *in place of*. The Antichrist wants to take the place of Christ, and sure

enough, he will gain a massive following, and he will wage war against the saints, particularly the Jews who finally come to accept Jesus as their Messiah.

It's a very dark time in Daniel's dream – but then seemingly out of nowhere, it turns sharply from these Gentile empires to the everlasting kingdom of Christ which is to follow. Beginning with **verse 9**, we read,

**⁹ “I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His vesture was like white snow
And the hair of His head like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.**

**¹⁰ “A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him;
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;
The court sat,
And the books were opened.**

¹¹ Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

Daniel's dream shifts to heaven and he sees the **Ancient of Days** – God the Father in His holiness, in His majesty, in His glory, and in His power – heavenly hosts are attending to Him, unimaginable numbers are standing before Him, and He takes the throne to hold **court**. God sits as the Judge and the **books** are opened. Yes, God has books. God is a perfect bookkeeper and He doesn't miss a single thing – ever – and thank God for His grace.

Then suddenly, without any elaboration, the fourth beast is killed, his body is destroyed, he's cast into the lake of fire, and his government ceases to exist – it's annihilated. The other previous empires, even though they had lost their dominion, they still lived on as part of the kingdom that conquered them, but not for the government of the Antichrist. There will be nothing left of it. Everything about it will be as if it never existed.

Daniel continues and beginning with **verse 13** he says,

**¹³ “I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.**

**¹⁴ “And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.**

The **Son of Man**, a title Jesus called Himself many times, comes before the **Ancient of Days** – Jesus comes before the Father, and just as the Father had promised, He gives His Son the kingdom – an everlasting kingdom **which will not pass away**. The time of the Gentiles comes to an end and the Kingdom of Christ begins with no end.

Jesus is coming, and when He comes, He rules. You know, Satan tried to give this earthly kingdom to Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness. Satan offered Jesus a shortcut – an easy way to avoid the cross – but Jesus would not take it, and thank God He didn't – for where would that leave us. Jesus went to the cross, He paid for His kingdom and He paid for His people in full, and one day He's coming back to take possession of what and who are rightfully His.

So, how are we to deal with all of this? I can tell you it's not to look for the Antichrist, even though this person may be alive today. We don't need to know who he is, or to add to the wild speculations that circulate among us, but there are two things we should do. First, Jesus told His followers to *keep working* until He returns. We got things to do – kingdom things, and we got good news to share.

Secondly, Jesus tells us to *keep watching*. When we see all these things happening that set the stage for the Antichrist – and they are happening, it's not the time to freak out – instead it reminds us Jesus is right around the corner to gather His people. So, get ready – Jesus is coming.

Source Material:

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