

# THE VISION OF THE FOUR BEASTS

Theme: An overview of the history of the times of the Gentiles that precedes the reign of Christ on earth. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version; copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)

We come now to the second great division in the Book of Daniel. The first six chapters had been about Daniel's personal history. And now, the next six chapters will deal with prophetic history--that is, history that was yet to occur at the time that it had been told to Daniel.

This particular chapter parallels the dream that was given to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2; and that was also dreamed and interpreted by Daniel. Though this chapter presents the terrible and brutal nature of the world empires of the times of the Gentiles, it nevertheless ends on the highest of all high notes--that is, of the earthly reign of Jesus Christ. God does not leave us in the dark about His plans. He lets us know that, though the times of the Gentiles will grow increasingly brutal, the joyful return and reign of His Son is sure and certain.

## I. THE CONTEXT OF THE DREAM (v. 1).

The second half of the Book of Daniel reports prophecies that were given to Daniel during various occasions during the personal history that is given to us in first six chapters. This first recorded prophecy (the first of four) was given during the first year of the reign of Belshezzar, king of Babylon--placing it approximately fourteen years before the 'writing on the wall' that's described in chapter five.

This prophesy was given to Daniel at a time when he was in his mid-sixties. It was given by God to him in the form of "a dream and visions" in his head while on his bed at night. Once it was completed, Daniel chose to keep the content of the dream to himself (v. 28). But he was clearly impressed with the authority of it, because he immediately "wrote down the dream, telling the main facts" (or "the sum of the matters", as it is in the KJV). It gives the 'divine viewpoint' of the dream he had been given several years earlier under the reign of Belshezzar's grandfather Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 2).

## II. THE CONTENT OF THE DREAM (vv. 2-14).

Note the scene of the dream (vv. 3-4). It was the Great Sea (that is, the Mediterranean Sea) being stirred up by the four winds of heaven. The name "Mediterranean" means "middle of the earth"; and if you were to note the different kingdoms that are represented in this dream, you'd find that they are all kingdoms that share the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea. Many scholars note that the "sea" is often used as a figure for the Gentile masses (Matthew 13:47; Revelation 13:1). The four winds of heaven probably represent circumstances, under the divine hand of the Sovereign God, that cause turbulence and a stirring in the Gentile world. It is from this "stirring" of the "sea" that these four world-kingdoms arise.

Note the kingdoms represented in the dream (cf. v. 17):

1. THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (v. 4). This is represented as a lion--the king of the beasts. It was the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Its two wings symbolize the swiftness with which it conquered. But its two wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man; and a man's heart was given to it. This probably symbolized the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar--Babylon's greatest king--as described in chapter 4.
2. THE MEDEA-PERSIAN EMPIRE (v. 5). This second kingdom is represented as a bear--a lumbering, awkward creature; but extremely brutal and deadly. Note that it makes its appearance "suddenly" (see the end of chapter 5). It was raised up on one side; probably

representing the fact that the Persian part of that empire soon exceeded and gained dominance over the Median part. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. This may represent a prey perfectly captured and consumed; but it also may symbolize the three chief cities of the Babylonian empire that Media-Persian captured: Babylon, Ecbatana, and Borsippa (see H.A. Ironside's commentary, p. 126). It was told to "Arise, devour much flesh"; and this the Median-Persian empire certainly did! It is represented by the arms of silver in chapter 2.

3. *THE GRECO-MACEDONIAN EMPIRE* (v. 6). This third kingdom is represented as a swift and deadly leopard or panther. Such a creature is naturally swift; but this one's swiftness is further accentuated by two sets of wings. "Dominion was given to it." This represents the remarkable swiftness with which Alexander the Great--the greatest of the Grecian kings--conquered so much of the world. This beast has four heads; which represent the later division of Alexander's kingdom to his four generals after his sudden death at the age of 33: Greece and Macedonia to Casander; Thrace and Asia Minor to Lysimachus; Syria and the Middle East to Seleucus; and Egypt to Ptolemy. Alexander is also represented by the male goat with four notable horns in 8:8. His kingdom is also represented as the belly and thigh of bronze in chapter 2.
4. *THE ROMAN EMPIRE* (vv. 7-8). This last kingdom is represented by a creature more horrifying than all the others--dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. Its huge iron teeth, and the fact that it devoured and trampled the "residue" (of the others), symbolizes its extreme strength and brutality. Its divisions are represented by the legs and feet of iron in chapter 2. Note that it had ten horns, representing the ten nations that would later characterize the Roman empire (see the ten toes in chapter 2; also Revelation 13:1-2; 17:3, 12-13). Another horn came up among them, causing three of them to be removed. This horn appears to be represented as acting like one man; and is symbolic of the Antichrist who will arise in the end times. Note carefully that this "little horn" should *not* be confused with the "little horn" of 8:9-12. The "horn" of that chapter speaks of Antiochus Epiphanes (B.C. 175-170), a king of Grecian origin who merely typifies the Antichrist. But the horn being described here in chapter 7 (that is, the Antichrist) is a product of the kingdom symbolized by the fourth beast. This horn is the "prince that shall come" (Daniel 9:26, 27); the "king" (Daniel 11:36-45); the one who brings the "abomination of desolation" (Daniel 12:11; Matthew 24:15); the "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:4-8); the "Antichrist" (1 John 2:18); and the "Beast" (Revelation 13:4-10).
5. *THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST* (vv. 9-14). The last of these Gentile kingdoms is followed by the return of Christ--the "Son of Man"--to earth to reign over the earth. His reign will be introduced by the destruction of the Antichrist (Revelation 19:19-20). The residue of the other kingdoms will remain, but only for a time. Christ's kingdom will be given to Him from the Ancient of Days (God the Father); and his kingdom will not pass away. The events of this passage--that is, the establishing of this kingdom in the heavenly realms--are described for us in Revelation 5. Note how, even as the 'little horn' is making his boasts on earth--between verses 8 and 11--the kingdom of our Lord is being established in the courts of heaven!

### **III. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM (vv. 15-27).**

These visions had an impact on Daniel both physically and emotionally. In his dream, he came near to a being--most probably an angel--and asked "the truth of all this". The angel explained that these four beasts are four "kings" (probably with the kings serving as representatives of the kingdoms); but that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever" (v. 18). This describes the millennial reign of Christ on earth with His redeemed saints (Revelation 20).

Daniel asks for further explanation regarding the fourth beast. He noted that the same beast had made war against the saints and prevailed against them "until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment

was made in favor of the saints of the Most High” (vv. 21-22). The angel then describes the history of the revived Roman empire that will come yet in the future; and the details of the reign of the Antichrist who will rule over that kingdom--persecuting the saints for three and a half years (Revelation 13:5-7)--that is, “a time and times and half a time”. His sudden destruction occurs at the time of Christ's return; at which time “the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High” (v. 27).

#### **IV. THE RESPONSE TO THE DREAM (v. 28).**

Daniel indicated a definite end to his dream. It was complete; because it was not something he came up with, but rather was a specific message given to him by God. The content of this dream troubled Daniel greatly--even changing his “countenance”. Perhaps this indicates that he was never quite the same after the experience. But he kept the matter to himself--except as it is written here. Much of what he was shown will be expanded upon in later visions in the later chapters of this remarkable book.