

GOD'S PATHWAY THROUGH PROPHECY

EMPIRES IN PROPHECY: God's Perspective Pt. 1

Daniel 7:1-18/Luke 21:24

INTRODUCTION: While Daniel 7 covers much of the same material as did Daniel 2, both in prophetic content and concept, it does so from an entirely different perspective of the “*TIMES OF THE GENTILES*”. Daniel 7 provides a vastly different reading of prophetic history in both symbol and substance. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream we have a humanistic view of the Empires in Prophecy. Fallen man sees the kings and kingdoms of this evil world as something majestic and magnificent. They are venerated and revered. They are institutions to be envied and allied with in efforts to throw off God and God’s Anointed One. In Daniel’s dream we have a heavenly view of the Empires in Prophecy. This view portrays the kings and kingdoms of this world as bestial and barbaric. They are vile, vicious, and virulent in their very character and conduct. To the God who is holy, fallen Gentile world dominance is reviled and revolting.

The two prophetic dreams of the empires in prophecy reveal that man tends to view history from a closed and colored lens. He sees events UNDER the sun according to his own prejudiced and perverted nature. Despite mankind’s arrogance and audacious error, within the context of his fallen nature God sovereignly uses him as His superintended instrument to convey inspired and infallible truth, and to accomplish His providential prophetic program through the unfolding drama of history past, present, and prophetic. But the God of heaven, who transcends man’s finite and perverse perspective, sees through an entirely different lens because He has an infinite view from ABOVE the sun. This Divine perspective, which stands in sharp contrast to man’s perverse perspective, is now presented in Daniel’s dream of four dreadful beasts. Through it we learn that what man finds attractive so as to be adored, God finds abominable so as to be abolished through judgment. From man’s depraved and deceived point of view the Gentile rule of planet earth will never end. But from God’s divine decree and disclosure, God’s people know the Gentile rule of planet earth is destined for destruction and shall give place to the coming Kingdom of God! As Psalm 49:12 states, “*Man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish*”. Such is the expression, exercise, and end of the “*TIMES OF THE GENTILES*,” as depicted in the message now before us in both outline and observation.

I. An Expository OUTLINE of Daniel’s Prophecy!

A. Daniel’s Inspired INTRODUCTION to His Vision – v. 1.

1. Its **PERIOD**
2. Its **PLACE**
3. Its **PRESERVATION**

- a. The **REVELATION** of the vision

- b. The **RECEPTION** of the vision
- c. The **RECORD** of the vision
- d. The **RELATING** of the vision

4. Its **PURPOSE**

B. Daniel's Inspired **IDENTIFICATION** of His Vision – vs. 2-14.

- 1. The **SEER** of the Vision
- 2. The **SIGHTS** of the Vision

- a. four winds of the heaven
- b. the great sea
- c. four great beasts came up from the sea

3. The **SUBJECTS** of the Vision

a. The First Beast: Like a Lion

- 1) had eagle's wings
- 2) the wings thereof were plucked
- 3) it was lifted up from the earth
- 4) made stand upon the feet as a man
- 5) a man's heart was given to it

b. The Second Beast: Like a Bear

- 1) it raised up itself on one side
- 2) three ribs in the mouth of it
- 3) devour much flesh

c. The Third Beast: Like a Leopard

- 1) four wings of a fowl
- 2) four heads

d. The Fourth Beast: Dreadful/Terrible Monster (e.g. Rev. 13:2 – Composite of the other three beasts with special powers provided by Satan)

- 1) dreadful and terrible
- 2) strong exceedingly
- 3) great iron teeth
- 4) diverse from all the beasts that were before it
- 5) it had ten horns

e. Another Little Horn

- 1) came up among them
- 2) before whom three of the first horns were plucked up
- 3) in this horn were eyes
- 4) a mouth speaking great things

f. The Ancient of Days (The Everlasting One)

- 1) the thrones were cast down
- 2) did sit
- 3) garment was white as snow
- 4) the hair of his head like the pure wool
- 5) his throne was like the fiery flame
- 6) his wheels a burning fire
- 7) a fiery stream issued
- 8) thousand thousands ministered unto him
- 9) ten thousand times ten thousand
- 10) the judgment was set
- 11) the books were opened

g. The Son of Man (Messiah)

- 1) came with the clouds of heaven
- 2) came to the ancient of days
- 3) they brought him near
- 4) there was given him
 - a) dominion
 - b) glory
 - c) kingdom
- 5) that all people, nations, and languages
- 6) an everlasting dominion
- 7) his kingdom shall not be destroyed

C. Daniel's Inspired **INVESTIGATION** of His Vision – vs. 15-16a

1. His personal **EXPERIENCE** in the vision
2. His personal **ENQUIRY** of the vision

D. Daniel's Inspired **INSPIRATION** of His Vision – v. 16b

1. An angelic **MESSENGER**
2. An angelic **MINISTRY**

E. Daniel's Inspired **INTERPRETATION** of His Vision – vs. 17-18

NOTE: The brevity of the angelic interpretation for Daniel must be carefully observed inasmuch as it throws light on the true locus of the prophetic focus. The true impress of this dream is not just to reiterate the points from Nebuchadnezzar's earlier dream, but to re-emphasize and expand upon the truths of the fourth and final beast-kingdom in its latter day revival stage followed by the coming Kingdom of the Son of Man initiated by the Ancient of Days. For this reason the larger focus of the angelic messenger is upon the impression of the dream as opposed to the interpretation of the dream. He does pause however to give two interpretive points.

1. The Four Beasts = Four Kings = Four Kingdoms (v.17a with v. 23)
 - a. The Lion = Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (606 B.C. – 539 B.C.)
 - 1) *“like a lion”* – Note the comparative word “like”. It provides an interpretive key informing the reader that symbolism is being employed. It is proper to symbolize terms within the text, when the inspired text itself dictates symbolism. Otherwise, it is proper to maintain a literal-historical interpretation of the terms of the text. In this, the text assumes dominance, and Scripture is allowed to interpret Scripture, free from carnal conjecture and sensational spiritualization. The king or kingdom is not a literal lion, but “like a lion” in character and concept. In like manner, just as the lion is the king of beast, so Nebuchadnezzar was the king of all Gentile kings during the times of the gentiles (Dan. 2:37). In God's prophetic program He alone, among all the Gentile rulers during the “times of the Gentiles” was both “the head of gold” and “the lion”!
 - 2) *“had eagle's wings”* – Refers to the supremacy, swiftness, and solitude of Nebuchadnezzar over all other kings and kingdoms. Just as the lion is the king of beasts and the eagle is the king of all fowl and soars into the heavens alone and above all others, so Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was the supreme king and kingdom of the times of the Gentiles. His was the true kingdom of gold, the standard by which all others were to be measured. He shows that political history and society are not evolving, they are devolving and disintegrating through a gradual death cycle of human depravity. This world-system is on an irreversible course of decline into a more vile, violent, vicious degradation.

- 3) *“the wings thereof were plucked...”* – Denotes the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar as set forth in chapter four as well as the gradual deterioration of the Babylonian Empire after the days of her greatest ruler.
 - 4) *“a man’s heart was given it”* – Speaks of the king’s conversion when he came to realize that the TRUE King of heaven is the Most High God who rules in the heavens with absolute supremacy and sovereignty over planet earth and its inhabitants (4:34-35). God graciously and gradually brought Nebuchadnezzar to the place of regeneration. He processed him from a polytheist who believed in many gods, to a henotheist who believed that God was the supreme God among the pantheon of gods, to a monotheist who believed that God alone was the only true God, to a Trinitarian who recognized and confessed that God has a Divine Son. God supernaturally and sovereignly took out Nebuchadnezzar’s heart of stone, and gave him a heart of flesh that he might know and believe the one true God, and His Son, the Messiah. Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion is one of the great themes of the book of Daniel, and shines forth the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinful man!
- b. The Bear = Medo-Persia under Cyrus the Great (539 B.C. – 334 B.C.)
- 1) *“it raised up itself on one side”* – Refers to the prominence and dominance of the Persian aspect of the union over the Median aspect of the empire. While this was prophetic when Daniel spoke it, history now confirms the veracity of the fact. Persia was the more dominant force under Cyrus the Great.

NOTE: Cyrus stands forth as one of the most fascinating figures in the whole of sacred writ. In addition to references in Daniel, Cyrus is specifically spoken of in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; throughout Ezra, and numerous portions of Isaiah. His name occurs no less than 24 times throughout the Old Testament. He was known as Cyrus the Great and conquered Babylon in 538 B.C. For all practical purposes he marks the beginning of Persian history. Although an unregenerate pagan, he was God’s chosen instrument in bringing the 70-year Babylonian captivity of Daniel’s people to an end. Concerning Cyrus, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, *“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid”* (Is. 44:28). A most fascinating feature of this predictive prophecy is not the fact that God can and did choose to use an unsaved pagan monarch to perform His purpose and pleasure; but the fact that God calls him by his personal name, Cyrus, centuries before the historical Cyrus was actually born into the world. It was indeed this very Cyrus who, after conquering Babylon, granted release to the Jewish captives (Ez. 1:1-4). 2 Chronicles 36:22 makes it graphically clear that Cyrus was acting in accordance to the sovereign and supernatural stirrings of God upon him. Without even realizing it, his heart was in the hands of the Almighty who had chosen him, created him, and called him for this purpose. Cyrus stands as a living testament to the inspired truth penned by

the wisest king to ever live, “*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will*” (Prov. 21:1). This is why Herbert Lockyer called him, “the king who illustrates Divine Sovereignty” (72).

- 2) “*three ribs in the mouth of it*” – Denotes the three great conquests made by the Empire over its enemies (i.e. Lydia by Cyrus in 546 B.C., Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C., and Egypt by his son Cambyses II in 525 B.C.).
- c. The Leopard = Greece under Alexander the Great (334 B.C. – 323 B.C.)
- 1) “*four wings of a fowl*” – Refers to the multiplied and unprecedented swiftness with which Alexander’s forces conquered the world, taking just ten short years to become leader of the ancient world.
 - 2) “*four heads*” – Speaks of the fourfold division of Alexander’s Empire following his death. History now confirms that these divisions were:
 - a) Ptolemy – Ruled over the southern kingdom of Egypt.
 - b) Seleucus – Ruled the northern kingdom of Syria.
 - c) Cassander – Ruled in the western regions of Greece/Macedonia.
 - d) Lysimachus – Ruled over Asia Minor.
- d. The Dreadful/Terrible Monster = Rome (322 B.C. – 1453 A.D.)
- 1) “*strong exceedingly*” – Speaks of the surpassing strength and stability of this fourth and final beast-empire just as the iron legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s image were comprised of a stronger metal than the other parts of the image. Rome was much stronger, and far outlasted all of the other kingdoms combined. This is a fact of history now confirmed.
 - 2) “*great iron teeth*” – Corresponds to the iron legs of the image in chapter two. Rome was the Iron Empire. Iron is unsurpassable in its durability and density!
 - 3) “*diverse from all the beasts*” – This fourth empire was to be different in that it was a composite of the earlier three as confirmed by Revelation 13:2. The Aramaic term translated “diverse” (*Shena*) denotes a quality or ability to transform and change over time. As a composite of the first four beasts, this fourth beast defied all natural, zoological characteristics, comparisons, and constraints. It was destined to transform into a revived ten-nation system depicted by the symbolism of the horns, and previously spelled out in the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s great image.

- 4) *“it had ten horns”* – According to verse 24 these horns represent a coalition of 10 kings/world leaders who will form a Western League of Nations coming out of the fourth and final beast as it morphs into its future and final expression. In other words, they correspond to the 10 Toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s image. Because the text pauses before expounding upon this final world coalition of forces from within the borders of the revived Roman Empire, we will follow suit and defer further reference until later.
2. *“which shall arise out of the earth”* – This sheds light on the symbolic meaning of the phrase, “came up from the sea” in verse three. Consistent with prophetic terminology, “the sea” represents the inhabited earth of unsaved men foaming forth the turbulence of wickedness and war. In other words, these four empires shall arise out from within the masses of unregenerate nations and peoples just as a tidal wave rises from the stormy seas and crashes hard upon the shores of humanity.

F. Daniel’s Inspired **IMPRESSION** of His Vision – 7:19-28

(Discussed in the next study in the series)

II. An Expository **OBSERVATION** of Daniel’s Prophecy!

NOTE: The following observation is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather seeks to highlight the key aspects of the prophetic narrative not already covered in the outline and yet necessary for accurate interpretation and application of the inspired text.

Vs. 1 – *“In the first year of Belshazzar”* – This was 553 B.C. which places Daniel’s dream 50 years after the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in the second chapter of the book. Nebuchadnezzar would have died nine years earlier in 562 B.C., and Babylon was destined to fall 14 years later in 539 B.C. This means that with the exception of the events of the dream directly related to Nebuchadnezzar himself, the entirety of Daniel’s dream deals with futuristic prophecy. This means that the dream was beyond the ability of Daniel. It was graciously granted by God to His servant. The facts and fulfillment of the dream were sovereignly revealed and supernaturally fulfilled in God’s appointed time.

“king of Babylon” – Belshazzar had just been entrusted with the throne by his father Nabonidus. Daniel’s dream took place in Babylon, the capital city of the Babylonian Empire, and geographical location of the ancient Garden of Eden. Today this region marks the area of modern Iraq.

“Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed” – Daniel the prophet, the author of the book, was the actual recipient of the dream. The dream was no mere dream, but a “vision-dream”. Such dreams have unique aspects to them which will be discussed later.

“then he wrote the dream” – Daniel not only received the dream, but under divine inspiration he recorded the dream to secure its preservation and ensure that its message would perpetuate to the time of the end. We must always keep in mind that Divine Revelation ensures the infallible reception of God’s truth, while Divine Inspiration ensures the infallible recording of God’s truth. Through revelation and inspiration God’s Word is perfectly preserved so that what is now contained in Scripture is the very Word of God in truth.

Vs. 2 – *“The four winds of the heaven”* – Refers to the universal sovereignty of God exercised through four great angelic princes (Rev. 7:1-3; 9:14-15). The Most High rules in all four quarters of the earth and controls the compass of the cosmos (Rev. 7:11). He providentially governs the affairs of all the motions and movements of human history. God is behind all scenes and He moves all the scenes He is behind. History is HIS STORY!

NOTE: It must be kept in mind that in Scripture the four points of the compass always measure from Palestine as its geographical center. The prophetic compass reached as far North as Armenia, as far South as Ethiopia, as far West as Tarshish, and as far East as China. The fact that Palestine always stands at the center of the compass strongly suggest that its literal and historical geographical boundaries assumes central importance in God’s program for planet Earth.

“upon the great sea” – Has both a literal and figurative sense. Literally it refers to the Mediterranean Sea (Josh. 1:4; 9:1; 15:12). Babylon embraced the shores that stretched along the eastern and southeastern edge. Medo-Persia controlled the same. Greece took in also the northeastern shores. Rome completely surrounded it so that the Great Sea practically became a “GREAT LAKE” of the Roman Empire. Figuratively “the great sea” symbolizes the swelling waves of unregenerate peoples and nations tossed about by the winds and waves of wickedness and war (Dan. 7:17; Rev. 17:15). To this day we still speak in terms of “the sea of humanity”!!!

Vs. 5 – *“Another beast”* – In the LXX the adjective, “another,” translates (*heteros*) literally meaning “another of a different kind”. Just as each metal in Nebuchadnezzar’s great image introduced a “different” type of kingdom, so does each beast in Daniel’s dream. Since the lion, the bear, and the leopard each represent literal-historical kings and kingdoms in real space-time, it seems logical to anticipate a literal-historical fulfillment for the fourth and final beast-kingdom.

Vs. 7 – *“Strong exceedingly”* – Remembering that when Daniel recorded his dream it was purely futuristic prophecy with the exception of portions related to Babylon. Here he predicts that Rome would exceed the other empires in strength and stability. History now reveals that Babylon lasted 70 years; Medo-Persia endured 200 years; and Greece continued for 180 years. In contrast the fourth kingdom of Rome lasted for over 1000

years. The kingdom of iron legs and iron teeth was stronger than all the other kingdoms combined.

Vs. 15 – *“I Daniel was grieved in my spirit”* – Marks the effect the dream had upon Daniel. He could not shake the dream. The Aramaic verb (*kara*) connotes that “which penetrates deeply, a piercing.” The dream penetrated deeply into Daniel’s emotional and psychological being. It cut him deep into the heart so that he could not shake it from his mind. He was constrained to have illumination.

NOTE: Based upon both the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and the dream of Daniel, we can glean that Divinely directed dreams leave an indelible impression upon the mind of man. When God chooses to sovereignly and supernaturally speak through dreams, such dreams are reoccurring, inescapable, and impressionable.

Vs. 16 – *“I came near unto one of them that stood by”* – The phrase, “one of them that stood by” refers to an angelic figure. It must be remembered that there were “ten thousand times ten thousand” of such holy beings standing nearby in the vision. This marks a fundamental difference between a mere dream such as was experienced by Nebuchadnezzar, and a “dream-vision” such as that now experienced by Daniel. In a dream the recipient is asleep and passive, while in a vision the recipient is awake in the spirit and actively involved. Daniel could engage with the participants of the vision.

“and made me know the interpretation of the things” – This is the principle of illumination. The reception of revelation comes through inspiration while the understanding of revelation comes via illumination. In Scripture illumination speaks of that sovereign and supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit, whereby He grants insight, understanding, and perception of divinely disclosed truth to His servants. Apart from such illumination man is incapable of rightly understanding the truths which God reveals. Spiritual things can only be made known to spiritual men by means of the person and work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-14)!

Vs. 17 – *“These great beasts, which are four, are four kings”* – This reinforces the principle set forth earlier that the king embodies the kingdom, and wherever the king is, there is the kingdom. Thus, the four beasts represent both four kingdoms and also four kings, with the fourth and final beast-kingdom issuing forth into a transformed revived coalition of Ten United Kingdoms to come. These yet future kings/kingdoms form the focus of what is to come. As kingdoms the four great beasts constitute godless systems of Gentile rule. As kings the four great beasts constitute godless sovereigns of Gentile rule. The first four beasts represented four historical and literal kings and kingdoms. This would suggest that the final expression of the fourth beast depicts a king and kingdom which is to be literal and historical.

QUOTE: *“It will be noticed that, in respect to the predicted events which have already occurred, the vision finds a literal historical fulfillment; and the same should be anticipated, then, in respect to the events which lie still in the future”* (Leon Wood: 178).