

LESSON 7

Four great beasts

Objective: To understand that world empires are cruel and terrible like wild beasts and look for the eternal, righteous and peaceful kingdom of God.

Bible References: Daniel chapters 2 & 7

Memory verses: (NKJV)

Dan 7:27

Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the most-high. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

Psalms 145:13

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Introduction

In which direction is this world moving? This is a question that is worrying political leaders and philosophers. But the future of the world is clearly forecast in the Word of God. Look back to Nebuchadnezzar's dream described in Daniel ch.2. What are the main parts of the image in the dream? What materials are they made of? Which empire does each of them represent? The first six chapters in the book describe the visions and dreams of gentile kings and their interpretations given by Daniel. Ch. 7 onwards describe the visions of Daniel himself. Their meanings are interpreted to him by a mighty angel. Ch. 7 contains Daniel's vision about world empires.

Description of the dream

Four diverse beasts came up from the great sea (Mediterranean Sea) when four winds blew upon it from four directions. The first beast appeared like a lion with eagle's wings.

As Daniel was looking, its wings came off and the beast stood up like a man. The second beast looked like a bear. It was holding three ribs in the mouth between its teeth. The beast was commanded to eat much flesh. The third beast was like a leopard. It had four heads and four wings. It was given dominion. The fourth beast was different from the others. It was dreadful and terrible and had big iron teeth. It devoured and destroyed and had ten horns. As Daniel was watching, a little horn came up in the midst of other horns and three of the old horns were uprooted. The little horn had the eyes like man's eyes and a mouth speaking great things. Then the Ancient of Days sat on the judgement throne and books were open. The beast was killed because of the big sound of the words spoken by the horn and its body was consumed by fire. Daniel saw the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven and establishing an everlasting kingdom.

Meaning of the dream

The four beasts represent four empires which had dominion around the Mediterranean Sea. Nebuchadnezzar's dream pointed to the external nature of the four world empires. But Daniel got the vision of their inner character. The beasts show the destroying nature of the empires. They kill and consume. World kingdoms cannot provide good and peaceful governance because of their violent nature. Prophecies about the empires were literally fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar's image and Daniel's beasts represent the same world empires. While the gentile king sees the outward glory of the empires, Daniel, the man of God, finds them cruel and destructive.

1. Lion: The beast like a lion and with wings of eagle is Babylonian empire. It is the same as the golden head of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The beast stands for the pride, glory and cruelty of the empire. The eagle's wings point to the speed with which Nebuchadnezzar's army moved. The loss of wings shows how the army became weak when the conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar turned mad. The fall of Babylon after 70 years of power and glory was prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. 13:1-22; 45:1-3; Jer. 51:36-39).

2. Bear: This beast point to the Medo-Persian empire represented by the silver chest and hands of Nebuchadnezzar's image. (This kingdom is also depicted as a ram with two horns in ch.8). Although this empire was not as glorious and powerful as Babylon, it was no less cruel or fierce. The number of people that this empire killed is beyond description. The command, 'Get up and eat the flesh' summarizes the cruelties of this empire. One side of the bear was seen as higher than the other. This appearance points to the higher status that the Persians enjoyed in the joint rule. The three ribs in the mouth of the beast represent Babylon, Libya and Egypt which were captured by Medo-Persians. As the Persian king Cyrus showed kindness to Israel, God allowed **the empire to remain in power** for more than 200 years from B.C. 536 – 331 (Heb. 1:1-4). The army of Alexander defeated the Medo-Persian army in B.C. 331. List of Medo-Persian kings are given below:

1. Median king, Darius - B.C. 538-536
2. Persian king, Cyrus - 538-530
3. Artaxerxes - 530-522
4. Darius - 522-486
5. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) - 486-465

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| 6. | Artaxerxes I | - | 465-423 |
| 7. | Darius II | - | 423-404 |
| 8. | Artaxerxes II | - | 404-359 |
| 9. | Artaxerxes III | - | 338-335 |
| 10. | Xerxes | - | 338-335 |
| 11. | Darius III | - | 335-331 |

3. Leopard: The brass belly and thighs of Nebuchadnezzar's image is pictured as leopard in Daniel's vision and point to the Greek empire. The same empire is pictured in ch.8 as a rough goat with a horn between its eyes representing the first emperor Alexander. (Read Dan. 8:21). Even though brass is less valuable than gold and silver, it is quite stronger than them. In a similar fashion, leopard is quite powerful and violent in nature as compared to lion and bear. The wings on the back of the leopard show the speed with which Alexander conquered other nations. He conquered all the then-known nations in the short span of 13 years. The beauty of the leopard represents the high level of Greek culture. The spots on its body point to the different groups of people in the Greek empire. The leopard had four heads and four wings. The empire was divided into four kingdoms after the death of Alexander. The same occurrence is predicted in ch.8 as four horns appearing in the place of one on the head of the goat (8:22). The Greek empire lasted for about 180 years from B.C. 330 to 150. The following four divisions came into being after Alexander:

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| 1. | Asia Minor | Under Lysimachus |
| 2. | Macedon (Greece): | Under Cassandra |
| 3. | Egypt: | Under Ptolemy |
| 4. | Syria: | Under Seleucus |

Palestine was under Syria in the beginning. Later in B.C. 301, it came under Egypt's rule. Under Egyptian rule, Jews lived quite peacefully. In B.C. 198, Syrian ruler Antiochus conquered Palestine and brought it under him. Antiochus Epiphanes who ruled Syria from B.C. 175 to 164 desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem and destroyed the city. He stands as a shadow of Antichrist.

4. The dreadful and terrible beast: The unnamed fourth beast symbolizes the Roman empire. We have already learnt that the iron legs and the iron/clay mixed feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image

stand for the Roman empire and the democratic governments that follow it. The iron teeth of the beast show the power of the Roman empire. Iron/clay mixture is the mixture of autocratic and democratic rules. Roman government was such a mixed type. The empire which came into power in B.C. 150 grew stronger and conquered Jerusalem in B.C. 63. The earthly ministry of Jesus happened when the Romans were ruling. The Romans became most powerful by first century A.D. The empire was divided into two as Western empire and Eastern empire in the fourth century. The Western empire ceased to exist in the fifth century. The Eastern empire continued in power till A.D. 1453 when Ottoman (Turkey) empire conquered Constantinople and converted the famous Sophia cathedral into a Muslim mosque. The ten horns of the beast and the ten toes of the feet of the image represent the nations that followed the Roman empire. Book of Revelation describes how a ten horned beast will emerge out of the sea of humanity and how it will be destroyed by Jesus Christ who will establish His kingdom (Rev. 13:1-2). The beast points to the emergence of Antichrist. “And another shall rise after them” in Dan. 7:24 is a reference to Antichrist. After he is destroyed, kingdom and dominion will be with “the saints of the most-high” (Dan. 7:27).

All the world empires and finally Antichrist will be subjected to the judgement of God and come to an end. Let us wait earnestly for an everlasting kingdom.

Questions

1. Describe the vision that Daniel saw about the future of world empires.
2. Describe the significance of each animal in the vision.
3. Are you preparing yourself for the establishment of the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ?
4. Draw pictures of the four beasts in Daniel’s vision according to their descriptions found in Daniel 7.
5. Compare the dreams in chapters 2 and 7.