

Hurst Green

1st Jul 2018

Daniel 7

The Dream of the four beasts

So now we come to the fun part of Daniel and his set of dreams about the end times.

You will have noticed over the years that I do not mention this a lot and for what I think is a very good reason.

You will find preachers and churches who dwell on this a great deal. They have the whole subject under control and can tell you the exact meaning of it all.

The end times equivalent of the price of everything and the value of nothing!!

And you end up with nothing of value for your life today and that is where our faith has to make the difference for we are living our faith while waiting for the second coming.

And then when you go round the different churches and preachers that dwell on this you find that they each have a different solution – some vary by a little and some by a great deal.

And this demonstrates the problem with dwelling too much on the end times prophecies – there are any number of interpretations any of which could be correct.

Probably the actual answer is a variation that none of us have considered yet.

In that situation there is little I can give you to help your life today and so I do not focus on these sections and today's dream and interpretation will demonstrate this for us.

So let us start with how to deal with those people who have got this taped down and tied up in a nice bow.

You are not going to change their mind and very few of them will even admit that there may be other ways of looking at this and so I suggest you do not try to debate with them – simply use the opportunity to learn and understand another point of view.

The answer lies in the approach of Romans 14 which is summarised as

Romans 14:1 (ANIV)

¹ Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

Although I do not suggest telling them that you are treating them as one whose faith is weak!!

If you are not familiar with it it is worth reading Romans 14 but I will just highlight two more verses

Romans 14:5 (ANIV)

⁵ One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

They are convinced in their approach just as you are in yours which may not be the approach I am recommending!!

And the other verse comes from Matt 7

Matthew 7:1 (ANIV)

¹ *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*

Where people are so convinced that they have it right and it is not a fundamental matter of salvation we should let them hold their belief while we hold our own contrary point of view.

It is for the Holy Spirit to convict them (or us) to re-evaluate our thinking and perhaps change our position.

And this dream gives us a lovely chance to see how things may be interpreted differently.

We have four beasts, similar to the four layers of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and we have the angel’s interpretation of them.

Note that the interpretation was given when

Daniel 7:16 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. “So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things:*

And so that should make things clear but at the end:

Daniel 7:28 (ANIV)

²⁸ *“This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”*

And it is the same for Daniel at the end of Chapter 8

Daniel 8:27 (ANIV)

²⁷ *I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.*

And so it seems the interpretation may not be as helpful as we might hope and we might need to wait for the end times to complete before we see and perhaps understand the meaning.

Now I said there “the end times to complete” and so I need to declare one particular position I hold in all of this.

Much of the teaching talks about the end times coming but I believe we live in the end times which are the times between the ascension of Christ and his marvellous second coming. The prophecies scattered throughout the bible cover much that will happen in those times and some can be seen to perhaps have happened.

Many other terrible things are yet to come.

And I hold this view based really on Matthew 24 when Jesus talks of the signs of the end of the age.

We are told of things that I see as having happened and are still happening and that is one of the dichotomies of prophecy.

- Many will come claiming I am the Christ
- Wars and rumours of wars
- Famines and earthquakes – which I see as having got worse in my life time

Those are described as the beginnings of birth pains and then we hit a key verse

Matthew 24:14 (ANIV)

¹⁴ *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

And we are given key lessons I have taught you before:

- If anyone says here is Christ do not believe it because everyone will see his second coming. I don't know how but I do know we will.
- False Christs and prophets will perform great signs and wonders to deceive the faithful. Signs and wonders are for the unbeliever and for the comfort and encouragement of the believer and so the glory goes to God not the agent he chooses to use.

Always remember

Matthew 24:27 (ANIV)

²⁷ *For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

And we also have those wonderful words from Joel quoted at Pentecost

Acts 2:17-18 (ANIV)

¹⁷ " *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.* ¹⁸ *Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

The actions of Pentecost and ever since were prophesied to happen in the last days!

So back to Daniel 7 and what we can make of this prophecy.

We have four rather terrifying beasts which I can simplify as a lion, a bear, a leopard and a gruesome beast.

The angel simplifies things for us when he says in v17

Daniel 7:17 (ANIV)

¹⁷ *The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.*

And so in Daniel 2 we had four kingdoms, Gold (Nebuchadnezzar), Silver, Bronze and mixed iron and clay.

Of course those kingdoms get swept away by the establishment of Christ's kingdom but more of that later

So we have four kingdoms:

- Nebuchadnezzar
- Medo-Persian
- Greek
- And Roman

Straightforward?

But I can find you other teachers with variations on the following ideas:

- Lion – the symbol of the British Empire and the wings are the USA that took over after World War 2
- Bear – of course Russia given the current political, social and economic moves that are making
- Leopard – The UN regards the world as having four areas which will be ruled by four heads and of course the EU is moving to achieve this for Europe
- And we can all find teachers to tell us the EU is the beast from Revelation

But that is not the correct interpretation but just a way in which the bible can be twisted for those who want teachers after their own hearing.

Why?

Because Daniel 7 goes on in verse 9 and 10 to talk of the setting up of the ancient of Days on his throne and that has to already have happened because Jesus defeated sin and set his throne on high but of the fourth King

Daniel 7:25 (ANIV)

²⁵ *He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.*

And Rome did just that. They spoke against Christ, oppressed the saints and tried to change what was happening and the saints were handed over to them for a time.

As an aside phrases like *a time, times and half a time*. crop up in prophetic literature and cause much debate and scratching of balding heads in academia and the best way of dealing with them is to consider it as a period of time which man is not told how long! (although of course you can find other definitions if you want a different one!!)

So what does this sort of prophecy actually do to help us? It seems it confuses, encourages us to take sides and have great debates in which the rest are wrong and we are right.

I believe

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

And from what I have said so far this is not!

But it is!!

See what Daniel 7 can show us to inform and encourage us today.

1. Daniel 7:1-8. All the power and kingdoms on earth are temporary. They are put in place by God – the four winds churning up the sea and they will be taken down by God

2. Daniel 7:9-12. The sovereign God will judge the world and from Daniel 2 has already set up the Kingdom of God which is touching earth and of which we are citizens whatever the world may throw at us.
3. Dan 7:13-14. Jesus has all authority (as he claimed) and his Kingdom is everlasting. Since it has already been established I can know that it can never be dis-established regardless of the world. Our God Reigns
4. Daniel 7:25-28. The saints will reign with him in glory. That is you and I and many millions others who believe in him and hold to that to the end. We will reign with him in glory!

Prophecy can be used and misused but it has a message for us today – we just need to look for it and understand it.