

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scriptures: Daniel chs.2; 7

*"2011 and counting..." (part 6)*

**THE SIGNS ARE ALL AROUND US!**

We continue looking at the signs that will be present before the Return of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have already looked at the signs pertaining to the rebirth and place of Israel in our world before Christ's Second Coming. We also have addressed the signs that will be present in society in general. Recall from **2 Timothy 3:1-6** that the Apostle Paul warns that in the last days difficult times will come and people will be lovers of self, money, pleasure.; they seemingly will be religious but deny God's power (the written Word – the Bible and the Living Word - Jesus Christ), and they will be very educated but never come to a knowledge of the truth that leads to salvation (i.e. faith in Jesus Christ). Something I failed to mention regarding the love of pleasure would be the incredible explosion in drug and alcohol abuse in the last two generations. Why do people take drugs and abuse alcohol? For the high (i.e. pleasure) that they bring. No one does drugs or gets drunk because it makes them feel bad, even though in the end that's what happens. And that's the problem with sin in general, isn't it? It gives us short term gratification, but long term it results in our demise.

Now today we are going to look at the signs that pertain to world government and politics. The Bible teaches that before Christ returns, the world will be dominated by an empire and a great ruler – popularly known as the Antichrist. This empire and world ruler will be opposed to Christians and Jews and will lead a worldwide invasion of Israel, a war popularly referred to as Armageddon.

When it comes to this empire, there are three main chapters in Holy Scripture that deal with it (Daniel chapters 2 & 7, And Revelation 13). Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 also describe the final evil world ruler who will seek to dominate the earth. There are several other chapters that concern this "Antichrist," which we will look at next sermon.

**BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND BIBLE PROPHECY**

Now before we look at the first two passages from the book of Daniel, I want to say a few things concerning Biblical interpretation. These days it is common for people to ridicule believers for taking the Bible literally. They say ,"Oh you don't believe that, do you?" Even in the church, there are segments with such an attitude (recall that the Episcopal Church is a perfect example). The problem is that the Bible is a literal book. It says this is the way it is, this is the truth, believe it, follow it, obey it. I mean if God didn't mean what He said, why didn't He say what He meant? At the same time, we also have to realize that the words that were written down were first written to believers thousands of years ago. So it is essential that we find the historical context of the passage, as well as the greater textual context of which it is a part (i.e. the book or letter it is from). We also need to understand that Scripture interprets Scripture. In other words, the passages of the Bible do not contradict, but they complement one another, and with this in mind we interpret every passage through the lens of other passages that deal with the same issue. That is why it is important to study the entire witness of God's Word. Finally, after determining the meaning of the Scriptures, we can apply it to our daily lives. That, my friends, is taking the Bible literally.

Of course, there are times when the Bible uses symbolic language, and the meaning of the words is not clear. In those instances, the Bible often sheds further light on the meaning as we read further, and sometimes when there is no further clarification, and in those cases, things can be open to interpretation. But this is the exception and not the rule. The truth is that when it comes to everything that is essential, the Bible is clear and can be understood by even children. That is the beauty of God's Word. Easy enough for a child to understand, yet complex enough to keep the most learned individual still learning. But to take whatever you want as symbolic is wrong, and to pick and choose what you want to believe is a grave mistake.

I am reminded of **2 Peter 1:20-21**: ***"But know this first of all, that no prophecy is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."***

In other words, God's Word is not subject to our own interpretation but it comes from God and has a specific meaning and purpose that does not change.

So what does the Bible say about the future of world government? Please turn now to **Daniel 2**.

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, has a dream that greatly disturbs him. So much so that he wants to know what it means. He calls all his priests, sorcerers and wise men to tell him the dream and its interpretation but no one can do it. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar is furious and issues orders to kill all the wise men of Babylon including Daniel and his three friends. Upon hearing the order, Daniel goes to the king asks him for some time, he prays to the Lord and the Lord gives him the meaning of the dream.

Why Daniel? God wants to show Nebuchadnezzar that He is the one true God. And that He, as the Lord of heaven and earth, knows the future. **Daniel 2:27**: ***"Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed."***

### **A GREAT STATUE**

Daniel tells the king what he dreamed. **31*****"You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. 32******"The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, 33******its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34******"You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. 35******"Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."***

### **THE DREAM'S INTERPRETATION**

**36*****"This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king. 37******"You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; 38******and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given***

*them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold. 39“After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. 40“Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. 41“In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. 42“As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. 43“And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.*

*44“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. 45“Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”*

So it’s clear that Daniel is speaking of earthly kingdoms beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s and then culminating in one final kingdom that is vanquished and destroyed by God’s Kingdom. What kingdom historically followed the Babylonian kingdom? The Medo-Persian Empire. And after the Persians? The Greeks under Alexander the Great. And after the Greeks? The Romans? And after the Romans? This is why many scholars believe that before Jesus returns, there will be a *revived* Roman Empire. Notice how the area of the statue that represents the fourth kingdom has not only legs of iron but it also has feet and toes of iron and clay. These two different parts of the statue suggest two stages of this kingdom in history. In other words, there will be a revival of this empire. How else do you explain the fact that the Roman Empire has been dead for 1500 years yet it is said to be present at the end of the age? Many have tried to revive the Roman Empire – Charlemagne, the Roman Catholic Church and its "Holy" Roman Empire, Napoleon, Hitler and Mussolini. All have failed. But one will succeed for a season - the Antichrist. We will see later why the Antichrist is the one who comes out of this empire.

I have mentioned before that it is no accident that since World War 2, the nations of Europe have come together to form the European Union with a common currency (the euro), a flag, a parliament, a president, courts, and even a national anthem! These nations are all democracies. Could the clay mixed with iron represent this dichotomy of democratic institutions giving way to authoritarian rule? Maybe. But one thing is for sure - the coming together of European nations represents the most powerful economic and military power block in the world. It sets the stage for the final revival of the Roman Empire.

### **A SECOND WITNESS – DANIEL 7**

The Bible says on many occasion, *“Let everything be confirmed by two or three witnesses.”* In other words, if something is right it will be confirmed more than once. It is why every important doctrine and principle of Scripture is always mentioned more than one time. So it shouldn’t surprise us that this order of Kingdoms is again set forth in **Daniel 7**. Please turn there now. The prophet Daniel sees a vision during the reign of another Babylonian king, Belshazzar and it is eerily similar to the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in **Daniel 2**.

**Daniel 7:1-4:** <sup>1</sup> *In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.* <sup>2</sup> *Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.*

<sup>3</sup> *Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.*

<sup>4</sup> *"The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, (recall the statue of Daniel 2) and the heart of a man was given to it.*

<sup>5</sup> *"And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'*

<sup>6</sup> *"After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.*

<sup>7</sup> *"After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast-- terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.* <sup>8</sup> *"While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.*

**What or who are the beasts mentioned in Daniel 7?**

#### **Daniel 7:16-18**

<sup>16</sup> *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: <sup>17</sup> The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.*

#### **Daniel 7:19-20**

<sup>19</sup> *"Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws-- the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.*

<sup>20</sup> *I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell-- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Note how "the horn" is more than just a kingdom, it is represented by a personality, a man who communicates in an arrogant manner (i.e. the "Antichrist).*

#### **Daniel 7:21-23**

<sup>21</sup> *As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them,*

<sup>22</sup> *until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.*

<sup>23</sup> *"He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.*

#### **Daniel 7:24-25**

<sup>24</sup> *The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.*

<sup>25</sup> *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. {or for a year, two years and half a year}*

The beasts that the prophet Daniel sees, represent four earthly kingdoms. Note how they parallel the four kingdoms set forth in **Daniel 2** (see above). The first beast represents the kingdom of Babylon. One of the main symbols used in Babylon to represent its authority was a lion with wings. You can see this creature on ancient Babylonian architecture. The second kingdom or beast represents Medo-Persia. The bear is has one shoulder higher than the other because the Medes first came to power and then were overruled by the Persians before the Persian Empire expanded. The third kingdom is the Macedonian/Greek Empire begun by Alexander the Great. A leopard symbolizes his empire to show how quickly it rose to power. Alexander's conquests took little more than a decade. As soon as he had reached India, he died at a young age (in his early thirties). His empire was then divided into four parts by four of his generals. Hence, the four heads and wings on the leopard. The final empire is more powerful than the other three. It is fierce. Everyone knows that the Roman Empire followed Alexander the Great and became the most powerful empire of all time. Our present calendar, elements of government and law are derived from the Romans. However, this fourth kingdom is more than just the Roman Empire. It must be a revived Roman Empire since it will "devour the whole earth," and will have arise from it a world ruler speaking boastful and arrogant words, seeking to change times and seasons and laws (he will seek to dominate commerce, politics, and religion).

Again do you see the parallel in **Daniel 2:40-43**: <sup>40</sup> *Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron-- for iron breaks and smashes everything-- and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.* <sup>41</sup> *Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.* <sup>42</sup> *As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.* <sup>43</sup> *And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.*

In fact, in Daniel 2, the fourth kingdom even has ten toes which relates to the ten horns in Daniel 7 and as we will see in our next sermon, the ten horns in Revelation 13. Out of those ten horns comes a little horn. Who is this little horn? It is clear from the context of Daniel chapter 7, that he is not only a powerful and arrogant leader, but who speaks against the God of the Bible and persecutes both Jews and Christians. When you study further in Daniel chapters 8, 9 11, and then Revelation 13 it becomes clear that this little horn is none other than the one who is commonly call the Antichrist. Next sermon we will learn more about this revived Roman Empire and how the Antichrist will come to power and rule the world. Until then, may we watch, learn and look forward to Christ's Return. He is our sure and certain hope! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, AMEN!