

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

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Scriptures: Revelation 13

"2011 and counting..." (part 7)

THESE ARE EXCITING TIMES!

I'm sure all are familiar with what is going on in the Middle East. From Egypt to Bahrain, from Libya to Yemen, from Jordan to even Iran, voices are calling for more freedom. People have been willing to march and die for some of the freedoms we take for granted, and a call for an end to repressive regimes. And while there is the danger of Islamic fundamentalism rearing its ugly head in this context, I believe we are seeing one more example of the pieces coming to together for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. World War 1 prepared the land for the Jews. World War 2 prepared the Jews for the land. World War 2 set the stage for the establishment of the United Nations and the coming together of Europe. The rise of the United States and individualism (i.e. the Bill of Rights) has set the stage for the love of self, money and pleasure (recall 2 Timothy 3:1-5). The fall of communism helped unite Europe even more. And now I believe we are eventually going to see a partial lifting of the veil of the Islamic curtain. Yes, these are exciting times.

We have been doing a series called 2011 and counting, looking at the signs that will precede our Lord's Return. We have looked at the signs pertaining to Israel, to society in general and now world government. The Bible teaches that there will be a final World Empire that will seek to rule the world and persecute God's people and turn against the one true God of the Bible. This empire will be led by a great ruler, popularly known as the Antichrist who 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, and one of these three also talks about this final world ruler. We looked at Daniel 2 & 7 last week.

A GREAT STATUE – DANIEL 2

Recall the statue that Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar saw destroyed in his dream, and which God revealed to Daniel not only the king's dream but its meaning. The statue's head of gold represents Babylon, the silver – the Medo-Persian Empire; the gold – Greeks Empire under Alexander the Great. And then there are the legs of iron and feet and toes of clay and iron, which seem to be indicators of the Roman Empire which followed after the Greeks. We noted that that this empire consists of two parts – iron legs but then feet and toes of iron and clay.

As a result of this twofold division, it is why many scholars believe that before Jesus returns, there will be a revived Roman Empire. And while today, a unified Europe does encompass much of the old Roman Empire, the old Roman Empire also included North Africa and parts of the Middle East. So I believe it is not out of the realm of possibility that Europe and the Islamic nations of N. Africa and the Middle East will forge some sort of alliance. What is going on now in the Middle East may in time tell us.

We also saw how the prophet Daniel revealed that the huge stone not made with human hands and which destroys the stature from the bottom – hitting that fourth kingdom first and then pulverizing into dust the rest of the stature - represents the Kingdom of God and how it will vanquish the kingdoms of this world. We also know that this Kingdom of God will be established by the Lord Jesus Christ! Can you see

why many Jews thought that the Kingdom of God would be established at Christ’s First Coming? But we know as Christians, that that was not God’s plan. It is again why there is the understanding that the Roman Empire will be “revived” before the end of the age.

A SECOND WITNESS – DANIEL 7

Daniel then has another vision with a similar theme that he record in his seventh chapter. He sees four great beasts. We saw how each of these four beasts parallel the representations of the statue in Daniel 7. For Daniel then goes on to say in verse 17, that ***The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.***

We know that just as in Daniel 2, the first beast represents the kingdom of Babylon because one of the main symbols used in Babylon to represent its authority was a lion with wings. Interestingly, the lion was their symbol for Ishtar, the goddess of war and fertility. 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).

REVELATION 13

But now let’s look at Revelation 13. Here we have a more detailed description of the final world empire which will be greater than all the empires before it. Note the similarities with **Daniel 7**. It should be noted that all of Revelation comes from Jesus Himself. For the book begins with these sobering words: **Rev. 1:1-3: *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”***

Three important truths we learn from this introduction that provides the very foundation of the rest of the book. First, the revelation comes from God the Father and is given through God, the Son, Jesus Christ. There is no authority greater! Second, the Apostle John testifies to its truth. This is based on an eyewitness testimony of what he saw and it is declared to be the Word of God and the witness of Jesus, Himself. And third, all who read the book will be blessed if they heed (obey) the warnings written in it. Now let’s look at **Revelation 13:1-18**. For readers my commentary is in regular print.

"And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. This will be a political alliance of nations with ungodly intentions.

² *And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. Note the use of animals that parallel Daniel 7:4-6 in the vision - represents the various empires that will be represented in the final empire of the Antichrist. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. The dragon is Satan (cf. Rev. 12:9).*

³ *I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. Assassination attempt that fatally wounds the antichrist, but he survives - is one possible interpretation. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;*

⁴ *they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" Satan will give authority to the beast (antichrist).*

⁵ *There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. Three and a half years is in view here. The second half of the final week (ie. "seven years") of Daniel 9.*

⁶ *And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.*

⁷ *It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. Persecution and martyrdom will occur while he will have authority over all the nations of the world.*

⁸ *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. He will exert great power and authority over the world.*

⁹ *If anyone has an ear, let him hear. (the choice is ours to believe or not to believe this testimony.)*

¹⁰ *If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. God has already foreordained what will happen. He knows the number of days each person will live and how they will die.*

¹¹ *Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon." This we will see is the false prophet.*

¹² *He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. The false prophet reigns for a time in conjunction with the antichrist - possibly an apostate pope.*

¹³ *He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. Recall again Jesus' words in Mt. 24:24 and Mk. 13:22.*

¹⁴ *And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.*

¹⁵ *And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

¹⁶ *And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, Everyone will be affected regardless of status or state in society.*

¹⁷ *and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Total control over world commerce.*

¹⁸ *Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. Whereas "7" is the number of God*

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and perfection, 6 is the number of man. This threefold "6" can be seen to represent Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet.

So the Apostle John sees two beasts, the first rising from the sea, the second rising from the land. The first represents a political ruler and the second, a religious leader. Both will be opposed to the One True God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. Both will persecute Christians and Jews. Both will be empowered by Satan. And both will seek to control every aspect of life on earth. But we know how it ends. They will be vanquished by our Lord when He returns. In the meantime, we can see all the pieces of one world government slowly coming together.

A NEW WORLD ORDER: One World Government and Religion

In fact, our world has sought to unify itself since the days the Tower of Babel (cf. **Gen. 11**). While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with world unity, unless it is under the Lordship of Christ and the spiritual direction of the Holy Spirit, it will not only fail but it will be corrupt, evil, and subject to the control of Satan. Recall that the Bible calls Satan, the devil, the "god of this world" (**2 Cor. 4:4**.) The truth is God has allowed Satan to rule the planet during this age of grace. When Satan tempted Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world, he said, "***I will give you all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish, Therefore if You worship before me, it shall be yours.***" (**Lk. 4:6-7**.) Satan desires to be worshipped and adored. He desires the whole world to be subject to him and to follow him. And he will empower a man with supernatural abilities and gifts to accomplish his desires and design for earth.

One of the ways to do this is to gain control over the world – its politics, its economics, its militaries, and its religions. We have already witnessed an attempt to do this with the establishment of the United Nations during World War 2 (the League of Nations following WW1 was a precursor). While the intentions were good - to establish worldwide cooperation of the nations for the peace and betterment of mankind, we know that there will be no real peace until Christ returns. Eventually, the Antichrist will be able to dominate this organization with his own power bloc of nations and his demonic and charismatic influence. Coupled with the advent of the computer age and the ability of our technology to control every aspect of society, it is clear that the days of this coming to pass are not that far away. To which we should all pray, "***Come quickly, Lord Jesus!***" In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!