

Prophecy: The Basics

by: Ronald L. Dart

There is, as I have noticed in the process of all my traveling around and maybe even more in my peregrinations on the internet, talking to people, reading messages people post, there's a real proliferation of ideas out there, as people feeling somewhat liberated from the constraints of the past, want to examine everything. I personally don't have any disagreement with that. I believe if you can prove something once, you can certainly prove something again, and the idea of examining the things we have been taught, searching the scriptures daily to see if things are so, I think is all very well. One of the things I find a little distressing and disquieting in the whole thing is to many people are postulating new ideas when they have not mastered the basics. I've talked about this before, that like in football, you've got to master blocking and tackling. There are certain things like that you've got to get nailed down before the finer points of football even mean anything. If you can't block; if you can't tackle; you can't play football. When it comes to the question of doing theology, as it were, or doing prophecy, or the many things that people like to study in the scriptures, it's really critical that a person nail down the basics. A great deal of what I am reading these days, by these people in doctrine and theology and prophecy, is really what I would call mid-air interpretation. It's attempts to explain all this stuff out here in the middle of nowhere without a foundation being properly laid for the things people are talking about.

I want to lay a foundation in prophecy. I think there is one book in particular, that unless a person nails this down, much of what we look at in prophecy is going to be incomprehensible or un-interpretable. You will not be able to put together any kind of a coherent theme of what's going to happen in the future. I've asked the question, "Why should God tell us what's going to happen in the future?" One of the reasons is that we can change the future, so that we can get out of the way, so that we can flee if we have to, so that we can repent if we must, so that somehow we can make our personal future different than what it might have been. That's one of the reasons.

Another reason is so that as history plays itself out, we will understand what is going on around us. Now I have, as I think many of you already know, have said that the future does not exist, that the future grows out of the decisions that you and I are making and that God is making day by day. There are, however, prophecies that would, at least on the face of it, seem to go contrary to that and one of them is found in the second chapter of Daniel. It's in a critical prophecy, because if whatever scheme of prophecy you put together, whatever sorting out of events in the end time you're going to encounter, it's got to fit the framework of Daniel 2. I'll explain to you why that is so as we go along through this very important chapter.

In the second chapter of Daniel it says, "In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams wherewith his spirit was troubled and sleep broke from him. And the king commanded and called the magicians, the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to show the king his dream, so they came and they stood before the king, and the king said to them, 'I dreamed a dream and my spirit was troubled to know the dream, so the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Syria or Aramaic and said O king live forever. Tell your servants the dream and we will show you the interpretation.'"

Aha! Look, we could start a business of the interpretation of dreams, couldn't we? If somebody could come to us and tell us his dream, and for a fee we could give him an interpretation, but what would that be worth to him. Well who knows, some of us might even be right once in a while in our interpretation of a dream. The point simply is, they said you tell us the dream and we'll show you the interpretation and Nebuchadnezzar was nobody's fool. He realized that they could tell him anything, and because, even though this was an emperor, a man with enormous power, a man who could snap his fingers and a man could be taken out and shot or hanged or whatever he was going to do with him. Even though he has this kind of power, his kingdom is not free of politics, and so the question would then arise: What are the political implications of this dream and what are the political implications of the interpretation that will come from all these different categories of these people in front of him, and if he called them in one at a time, isolated them and got their interpretations of his dreams, we all know that the dreams would have been interpreted according to whatever particular political idea that the interpreter in question had brought in.

"And the king answered and said (now we don't know whether he means this literally or he's just putting their feet to the fire). He said, "The thing is gone from me. If you will not make known to me the dream with the interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces and your houses shall be made a dung hill." This is pretty extreme and it almost sounds like Nebuchadnezzar is fed up with the Chaldeans and his astrologers and his soothsayers, and he's ready to make a clean sweep of them, and I can kind of halfway understand what's going on here in the sense that these people, all of them, would have formed an incredible hotbed of politics and intrigue in the imperial palace, and no excuse to get rid of them all should be overlooked. So here's an excuse, ready made, at hand, to get rid of them. He said, "If you will show me the dream and the interpretation, you will receive of me gifts and rewards and great honor, so show me the dream and give me the interpretation, and they said, 'Well let the king show us the dream and we will show him the interpretation of it. Again we can do that.' The king answered and said, 'I know of a certainty you're stalling. You're trying to gain time, because you see the thing is gone from me, but if you will not make known to me the dream, there's only one decree for you, for you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak to me until the time be changed.'"

Now what that means I couldn't tell you. But something is on the horizon, and these people have already prepared, before they even knew there was a dream, lying and corrupt words to speak before the king. There was an incredible amount of palace intrigue going on here as to what was going to happen. I don't have any question that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. I do have a question of whether it was truly gone from him or not, and I have no question that he

really wanted an excuse to make a clean sweep of the entire category of soothsayers and Chaldeans. He said, "Try this. (Verse 7) Tell me the dream and then I will know that you can tell me the interpretation of the dream. The Chaldeans answered the king and said, 'There's not a man on earth who can show the king's matter. There is no king, lord, or ruler that asks such things that any magician, astrologer or Chaldean and it's a rare thing that the king requires. There is no one who can do this except the gods who don't live among men.' For this cause the king was angry and not only was he angry, he was very furious, and he commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon."

Here was his chance to wipe them all out. "And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain and they sought that Daniel and his companions be slain," because Daniel was considered a wise man. Daniel and the guys who were with him were going to be killed right along with the rest of them, "so Daniel answered (Verse 14) with wisdom and council to the captain of the king's guard whose name was Arioch who had gone forth to carry this out and he said, "Why is the king so hasty? Arioch made the decree known to Daniel, so Daniel went in and desired of the king that he would give him time, and he would show the king the interpretation, so Daniel went to his house and made the thing known to his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (by the way for your little Biblical quizzes, trivial quizzes, watch out for these three names. These are Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, the three Hebrew children who were thrown into the fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are their Chaldean or Babylonian names. Their Hebrew names are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.) He asked that they might desire the mercies of the God in heaven concerning the secret that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with all the rest of them. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision and Daniel blessed the God of Heaven, and He answered and said, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever. Wisdom and might are His and He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; He reveals the deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness and light dwells with Him. I thank You and I praise You, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might and has made known to me now what we desired of You. For You have made known to us the king's matter. "

Now up until this point, you may read this and think to yourself, well this is rather interesting, a vision that is given to the king, but when we come to understand the scope of this vision, this dream, it becomes rather remarkable, the circumstances under which it was given, because the dream, which is about the entire history of at least one segment of man, from Nebuchadnezzar until the return of Christ, is revealed to this man in a dream and it is not revealed initially to Daniel or any other prophet of God. It's revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, of all people, and I think a person should at least ponder why God would choose such a momentous thing to such a man rather than reveal it in the first place to Daniel. Now I can think of one reason. One is the validation of it. For you do not have merely two Hebrew poets, as it were, one having a dream and the other confirming it. You have the most visible and powerful man in the world vouching for the accuracy of the dream and consequently validating Daniel's interpretation. This thing, you know, is like having the equivalent of having the President of the United States, who right now is the most powerful man in the world, vouching for the fact that he had a dream and

somebody over here interpreted it. I would gather that you could pretty much count on the king of Babylon's word on something like this. I know you could count on Daniel's word.

Daniel went to Arioch and he said, "Don't kill anybody. (Verse 24) Take me before the king and I will show the king the interpretation, so he brought him in haste and he said, "I have found a man among the captives of Judah and he will make known to the king the interpretation, and the king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar (there's another Biblical trivial question. Belteshazzar was Daniel's Babylonian, or Chaldean name) and he said, "Are you able to make known the dream that I had seen with the interpretation?" Daniel answered in the presence of the king and said, "The secret which the king has commanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers, they cannot show this to the king, but there is a God in heaven that reveals secrets and makes known to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, what shall be in the latter days. Your dreams and the visions of your head upon your bed are these: As for you O king, your thoughts came into your mind upon your bed, what shall come to pass hereafter."

Before he went to bed he was lying there in his bed at night thinking to himself, "I wonder what the future holds. Where is all this going to lead? How is the intrigue that's going on here going to turn out? What is the future of my kingdom and of the things that are to come hereafter. He said, "He that reveals secrets (Verse 29) makes known to you what is going to come to pass. As for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than anyone living, but for their sakes who will make known to you the interpretation and that you might know and you might understand the thoughts of your heart." Daniel then tells him, "You in your dreams (Verse 31) saw a great image. This great image whose brightness was excellent stood before you and the form thereof was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, his breasts and arms of silver, his belly and thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. You watched until a stone was cut out without hands and smote the image upon his feet, that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, the gold, broken to pieces, and became as the chaff on the summer threshing floors and the wind just blew everything away and no place was found for any of it. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."

I can only imagine what was going through Nebuchadnezzar's mind about this time, because even though the dream had fled from him, once Daniel described it, it would have come rolling right back. Yes, yes, yes, that's what I saw, and here's a man who is able to tell me what the dream was. Daniel says, "This is the dream and I will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. You O king are a king of kings."

All by itself that is an astonishing statement, for Daniel says the God of heaven has given you a kingdom and power and strength and glory. This is not something that Nebuchadnezzar had managed to come to on his own. It was because God had decreed that this man would come to power at this point in history and had handed him this kingdom. He was really the first great world ruling emperor at this time, at least of the world that anybody knew anything about. What I think is also very significant about this is that this history, that we are reading about

here, begins with Nebuchadnezzar who is the first great gentile king after the final fall of Israel. It is almost as though, up until this time in history, it was the age of Israel, but with the fall of Judah and Judah going into captivity in Babylon, now begins the age of Babylon. That seems to be the thrust of the events that we get here, because as we will see, this great image that we see, although it is one unified thing from top to bottom, it spans the entire length of time from the day in which Nebuchadnezzar was alive until the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God. That image encompasses the entirety of the dominant age of the world from one time to another.

He goes on to say. "Wherever all the children of men dwell, (Verse 38) the beasts of the field, the fowls of the heaven, he has given into your hand, has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold. After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you and another kingdom of brass that shall bear rule over the earth." Now historians have looked at this, there is almost total agreement on it, there might be a few fringe commentators who are different on it, but the primary thrust of this is clear. Babylon was succeeded by the Medo-Persian Empire, which was inferior to the Babylonian Empire like gold is to silver. The Medo-Persian Empire was finally conquered by Alexander's empire, the Grecian Empire. They were the belly and thighs of bronze or brass, "and a fourth kingdom shall arise that shall be strong as iron. For as much as iron breaks in pieces and subdues everything, and as iron breaks all these things, so shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas you saw the feet, the toes were part of potters clay and part of iron, the kingdom will be divided, but there shall be in it of the strength of iron as much as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay and as the toes were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken. And as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cleave to one another like iron cannot mix with clay."

So you have a brittle, mixed kind of a people's kingdom or power at the very end time of all of this because it takes you finally all the way out, down to the toes of this creature. Now I don't know, Daniel doesn't make much of the number ten- that there are ten toes on the normal human body. He doesn't seem to make an issue of that, but it becomes an issue later on particularly in the book of Revelation, where this number ten keeps coming back in a relationship to the kings which give their power for one hour to something that is called the Beast, but that's something that's out there a little further, and right now we're trying to establish the basic, fundamental framework into which all that stuff has to fit. He goes on then to say (Verse 44,) "In the days of these kings..." Now the way in which that is put "in the days of " implies not the whole period of time, but in a particular narrow spot of time, so you would say in the days of these kings (plural) what does this mean? Does he mean in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, Medo-Persian Empire, you know like Cyrus, Alexander and then of Rome and all the Roman emperors- is that what he means by that? Or does he mean the kings that are represented by the toes of this great image? You can't tell by the context of Daniel precisely what he means by that. You just have to take that and file it away in your memory for future study, so that whenever you come across other things in prophecy you can relate them to this particular passage.

"In the days of these kings, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and shall consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever." Remember what that was back in the vision of the dream that he said all the stuff was there and said you watched until a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the feet which were of iron and clay and broke them and carried them away, and the stone, toward the end of verse 35, became a great mountain which filled the whole earth. Now all of us by now have got down in our minds that this is talking about the kingdom of God. Christ is that stone cut out without hands. Christ is that great cornerstone of God's Church, and Christ is the one who returns, smashes this image on its feet and as a result of that brings the whole edifice collapsing down in pieces, and it says this kingdom shall stand forever. So it's fairly easy to get the picture of what's talked about here-that you have a single image, a unified image, that finally deteriorates in quality and increases in hardness down through the passage of time in history until its hardness finally becomes brittle and fragile and mingled and yet not bound to the place that finally, at the end, a stone smites it on the feet, crushes it and brings the whole edifice down unto nothing. This is the pattern that Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar from his dream of world history. Really from that time until the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God is all in this dream.

Now what's interesting to me, and I was thinking about this just this morning: if you were a Jew and living in the first century, what would you think about Daniel's vision of this kingdom? Would you have seen it any other way than the way commentators today see it? With Nebuchadnezzar, with the Medo-Persian Empire, Alexander's Empire followed by the Roman Empire, for these were the dominant, world-ruling empires in strict succession down the line. What is more significant or just as significant, and I don't know if they thought of it, but it's clear looking back in history, that the thing that all these kingdoms had in common was their god - was their religion. The Babylonian religion found their way right through the Medo-Persian religion, right into Greece and right into Rome, so that the same overall dominant spirit, shall we say angel or whatever it may be, or prince, dominated that kingdom from Babylon to the very end. Whatever you may think about that, it is fairly clear that the system is the same system all the way through. Now when you understand this, you will understand perhaps why it is that the general thrust of most prophetic studies of this take us through Alexander to Rome and ultimately to the heartland of Europe, because that is the path whereby the Roman Empire developed. All the way down to modern times when Adolph Hitler adopted all manner of Roman paraphernalia, methodology and so forth of the Holy Roman Empire and in putting together the Third Reich, the third kingdom, really the third empire that had developed in the center of Europe, that was essentially Roman in spirit, thought, attitude and direction. There's not much question about it if you merely follow the bread crumbs right through history to that event, and so consequently you have that brittle, remaining Roman Empire, existing all the way up until finally when Christ returns and brings the whole thing crashing into a heap.

"For as much as you saw the stone (verse 45) was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, that God had made known to the king what shall come hereafter. The dream is certain and the interpretation thereof is true." Now there's something I think is very important-let's continue the verse though. "Then King

Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and worshiped or did obeisance to Daniel (he bowed to Daniel) and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odors to him, and the king answered unto Daniel and said, "of a truth, God is a God of gods, a Lord of lords, and a revealer of secrets seeing you could reveal this secret..'" Then the king made Daniel a great man and gave him many gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and the chief of the governors and wise men of Babylon. So Daniel requested of the king that he set Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king."

The thing I think that needs to be understood about this thing too, as you read through it, that this is not just a matter of God looking into the future and seeing what is going to happen and revealing it to Nebuchadnezzar. God has decreed that this is going to happen. In other words, basically he told them this is the pattern I am going to work out through these kingdoms right on down to the time of the end. The age of Israel had passed; the age of the gentile kingdoms had come in, and that's the pattern we're going to follow. We will go through these four successive kingdoms that will develop out of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom ending right at the very end time. Now as I've said before, anyone who is going to try to interpret prophecy, needs to interpret this vision. They need to understand this vision and they need to understand and have a grip of the history, the actual history on the ground of how this worked out, because people keep trying to take this image off into Russia or off into the East or somewhere, anywhere but right up through Rome and right into the European heartland which is where history took it. I've said this before, if you don't understand history, you are not going to be able to interpret Biblical prophecy.

Isaiah said when he talked about this, talking about the gods challenging him on the question on prophecy, and proving that they're gods, he said, "Let them (Isaiah 41:22) bring forth; let them show us what's going to happen; let them show us the former things, what they be, that we may consider them and understand the latter end thereof. Show us the former things so that we can study them and understand the latter end of it." Those we see these days interpreting prophecy out there in mid-air do not have a good foundation laid in history. If they do have it, it is well hidden, and they have certainly not taken the trouble to lay the history out in their writings they're making about prophecy as we approach the end time.

Now there are some important things to understand and if you pass on down to the seventh chapter of Daniel, here is another one and this time Daniel has the vision. There is something about this that has troubled me just a little bit and has left me feeling that while we have the basics correct, there are some things just above the basics that we may not have fully understood as we might have understood them. In Daniel 7, "The first year of Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed. Then he wrote the dream and he told the sum of the matters. Daniel spoke and said, 'I saw in my vision in the night, and behold the four winds of heavens strove about the great sea and four great beasts came out from the sea, all different from one another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I looked until the wings thereof had been plucked and it was lifted up from the earth and

was made to stand on its feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, like a bear, and it raised itself up on one side."

Now before I go any further, I want to stop and try to get one piece of understanding across. There is an area of study that we frankly have given very little thought in years gone by, and a lot of attention needs to be given to it.

In fact not many people who attempt to interpret Biblical prophecy have given an awful lot of attention to this. The topic is, the word for it is "iconography," which means basically the study of icons and the method in which they were represented in times gone by. Now the word "icon" is becoming much more familiar to us in modern times because of computers. All of us use icons if we use computers. All computer programs have little icons across the top of the computer screen that you can click on and you look at them and because you know the shape of a printer, or you know the shape of what this little icon is all about, you can click on it and it will either save your file, print your file or delete it. You can do all kinds of things, and you do not have to be able to read to do that. You can actually just pick on a icon and away it goes.

They use these icons because the icon is small. They don't have to write out the word "printer"; they can put an image of a printer (well it sort of halfway looks like a printer) at the top of the computer screen, so icons have become familiar to us from computers. Most people see them anyway. If you're walking through an airport these days, especially an international airport, this is going to be true, because people can't depend on what language people speak as they walk through your airport. They use icons for different things that people might be looking for at the airport. They have a little suitcase up there that points you to baggage claim. They have a little image of a man and a little image of a woman to tell you where the men and woman's restrooms are. And so it goes it goes. There is the little circle with a line going through it which tells you don't go in here. You can actually go to Frankfurt, Germany and not know a word of German, and make your way through the airport fairly well because of the little icons all over the place which tell you where everything is without reading even one word of German.

In the ancient world, not only was there the question of what language people might have spoken, the very big question was whether they could even read at all, much less read any given language, so icons were very common.

The symbolism was very well known by people of what various and sundry icons, or what a symbol within a picture even, was going to convey. In fact even as late as the Medieval times, and to this day it is still known. If you are knowledgeable of the symbols, the icons, you can see a row of statues of twelve men and you can figure out that because there are twelve and you're in a church, that these are the twelve apostles, but I would defy most of you to figure out which apostle was which out of that line, because none of you ever saw them, right? Neither did the guy who carved those statues, so how does he make Matthew, Matthew, and how does he make Mark, Mark; how does he go through all these different people? Well the answer is: all these statues have a small symbol connected to his person, and if you are knowledgeable, you can look the statue over and find that little symbol, and say oh yeah, that's Matthew, that's Mark, and so on it goes down through all the twelve apostles. These are icons; this is how they work.

When Daniel wrote this, he saw it and wrote it down, "And he saw a great beast (Verse 4) and it was like a lion with eagles' wings." Now that was a strange creature- a lion with eagles' wings. The fact of the matter is, if you do archeology in the ancient world, your going to see all kinds of combinations of different creatures with the head of one animal and the body of another; a lion with wings on its back, or a bull with wings on its back. Each and every one of these symbols had meaning at the time. Now the killer for us is, the hard part for us, just as language changes over time, so do the icons, and what an icon might have meant, let's say a thousand years before Christ, it may have no longer meant 500 years before Christ or 500 years after Christ. By diligent work in archeology you can sometimes, not always, find out what a given icon actually meant. Now you can look at this first beast here and say well I saw this beast and it was like a lion and it had eagle's wings. Now I could do a little interpretation for you about the British lion and about the American eagle and say this is a combination of Britain and America which are the sons of Joseph in prophecy, and therefore this first beast is a combination of the English speaking peoples. But that's an example of interpreting something in mid-air. You just take the symbols as you and I understand them today and apply them to back at that time and chances are awfully good we're going to miss it entirely. The fact of the matter is at that time the lion was the symbol of Babylon, and so consequently this particular beast was Babylon. The bear that follows it which raised upon one side and had three ribs in the teeth of it, this bear was the Medo-Persian Empire, not the Russians of today, but the Medo-Persians of that time, and so on it goes!

It says, " And after this (verse 6,) I beheld another like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl, and the beast had also four heads and dominion was given to it. "Now this is really strange, you know, but it all means something to the person who knows the icon. You know the heads symbolize something. I was looking in an encyclopedia this morning under iconography, and there was this seven headed Buddha. There was this Buddha sitting there with seven heads stacked up one on top of another, straight up, and you wonder how do you visualize the seven heads? Were they across the shoulders like this? But in the case of this Buddha they were straight up on top of the other. Of course the purpose of this is not to represent some form of reality; it is purely symbolic. If the person knows the symbol, it conveys meaning to the person that's involved in it, but this one is really not that difficult, because it roughly follows the sequence that Daniel had in the original vision. Babylon, Medo-Persian Empire, Alexander following that, then Rome following that which we will come to in just a moment. The leopard symbolizes Greece; it symbolizes Alexander and the four wings like a fowl on its back and the four heads is a fairly obvious reference to the four generals of Alexander who divided up his kingdom after he died.

"Then I saw (Verse 7) in the night vision, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly, and it had great iron teeth and it devoured and broke it pieces and stamped the residue with the feet of it, and it was different from all the other beasts before it, and it had ten horns." A horn is more or less a symbol of a king. It had ten kings. The image had ten toes right at the base of it, and so you keep finding these combinations of sevens and tens, and when you put them all together from Daniel to Revelation, certain patterns begin to emerge.

"He said, 'I considered (Verse 8) the horns and there came among them another little horn, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.'" The implication is that this little horn, whatever it is, is a big mouth character, a big mouth saying lots of things, having a lot to say. "Now I watched," he said, "until thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days was sat down, his garment was white as snow, the hair of his head was like pure wool, His throne like a fiery flame, its wheels like a burning fire." This harkens back to Ezekiel's vision as a matter of fact, and it seems very clearly to be God. "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. Judgment was set and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke (because it really did exalt itself. It spoke against God) I beheld till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame."

Now if you've read much of Revelation, you'll have recollections coming back about the beast being thrown into the lake of fire at the time of the very end. And this mouth speaking great things was thrown in there with it. The beast and the false prophet were thrown in there. Most people looking at this interpret this beast as the Roman Empire, the last bit of the Roman Empire, and this little horn as being the false prophet who gives a great deal of power to that beast at the end time. Now what is fascinating about this as concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. Now the reason I say this is interesting is because when you look at the image in Daniel, you tend to think of a top to bottom time line, don't you? This is logical because Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold and it succeeded all those years down through history, through years and decades and generations, right down through those four kingdoms. As one kingdom came on the scene, the other faded from sight, and so you have a linear thing in time. Now when you come to these beasts, they seem to be the same four kingdoms, but they seem to be contemporaneous, not linear. If you study it, it's here, because it says that fourth beast was destroyed with that little horn, but the other four beasts had their lives prolonged for a season and a time. Now that's not really easy to follow. But the implications of it is that the dominant system, the Babylonian system, survives whole until the end time. It just suggests that there is a sequence of domination from one part of it to another part of it to another part of it. One then would look around today and try to say that we're not merely looking at one dominant power. We're looking at four that exist, all at the end time, one of them stronger and three of lesser power than the other one. One of them, the beast, which is thrown into the lake of fire along with the false prophet. The others manage to survive that and continue on for a season and a time after that. Who are they? I don't know, but the thing is, one of the reasons we might not know is because we haven't come to a time when this stuff begins to become apparent to us. Another reason we might not know is because we have never thought about it quite this way and the realization that it is not merely a linear kingdom down through time, but that the whole system survives until the return of Christ. That would tend to agree with the comment that was made by Daniel, that the image was smashed in the days of these kings. In that sense it would mean the whole system. In the days of these kings, Christ will return, smash the image on its base and destroy the whole thing, and the whole thing gets blown away.

So here you have two visions that I think are extremely important. If you're going to understand these things, these things are decreed by God. Now what that means to me is that God will, at whatever juncture in history it is necessary, will make the necessary interventions in history to see to it that this pattern follows through. This is what he has decreed will happen, so he will see to it. God actually brought Nebuchadnezzar to his throne; He brought Cyrus to his throne and foretold his name before the man was ever born. He brought Alexander into the fore and made him a world ruler, and he brought the Roman Empire into its greatness. What's interesting about Rome is, in its earliest years it was really quite a different place from what it became. It was really one of the greatest kingdoms there ever was on the face of the earth, because this was a time when the world was at peace; it was a peace that was enforced by Rome. You could travel the roads in the Roman Empire with relative safety, because of the Roman Soldiers and what they were doing to police the world at that time. Rome, of course like any great power, became corrupt over time and became what we later came to see it to be.

Now these visions are all really very fascinating, but when you come to the book of Revelation and that famous 13th chapter of Revelation, you cannot interpret this chapter in mid-air. You have to relate this to Daniel and you have to fit this into that pattern that we've seen before. It has to fit with the history that is on the ground that has followed through. We can't take modern meanings of icons and put the modern meanings of icons on the symbols we see back there. If you're going to understand the meaning of the icons, you're going to have to do a lot of digging, through archeological books and works to find out what were the symbols that were in use at that time. We have verbal descriptions of these things which the people who originally heard these prophecies probably recognized. When Daniel saw a leopard with four wings on its back, that symbol probably meant something to Daniel at that time, because it was an icon just like when you go through the airport and see that little piece of luggage, you say, okay that's the way to where the bags are-the baggage claim. Daniel and some of the others, when they saw these symbols, knew what they were pointing at in ways that you and I might very easily miss if we're not careful.

Revelation the 13th chapter is one of those fascinating scriptures coming up in the end time that everybody wants to know how this is going to play out. Well, however it's going to play out, it must be like a piece of a puzzle set into Daniel's prophecy. He said, "I stood (Verse 1) upon the sands of the sea. And I saw a beast (by the way, in both Hebrew and in the Greek, when you see this word beast, all it means is animal-It has no overtones of a beastly beast, or anything of the sort) rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and on his heads blasphemy." Now we have, and one would have to assume based upon Daniel's vision, that this beast rising up out of the sea has to fit somehow in that set of four beasts that Daniel saw, because that is the end time pattern that Daniel's giving us. He said, "The beast (Verse 2) that I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, his mouth is like the mouth of a lion, and the dragon gave him his power and his seat and his great authority." Notice the implication-one system with the same icons, the leopard, the bear and the lion-you know here we are again with this same system. Now it's presented to us not as four beasts rising up, but it's one beast rising up with all that power, all the implications of all those kingdoms going back to Nebuchadnezzar himself. He goes on to tell you about this creature.

He said it had seven heads and ten horns. Now this has variously been interpreted to mean the ten horns being ten kings that would be putting their power together right at the time of the end. The seven heads being the seven successive resurrections, as it were, of the Roman Empire. All of that makes a certain amount of sense in that you can go back in history and see that it took place. He said the beast though that he saw was given its power and its great authority by the dragon, and we all know from the book of Revelation that the dragon is that Old Serpent the Devil, Satan (Revelation 12:9.).

"I saw one (Verse 3) of his heads, as it were, wounded to death. And the deadly wound was healed and the whole world wondered after the beast." Now this is something God has apparently decreed for the end time, and one would sort of assume, if these heads are successive, that probably it is the last one that is wounded and that deadly wound was healed. I think that historically people have pointed to one of the earlier Roman Emperors that would fit this category, but I'm not so sure about that. I think there's a certain logic, as you read through here, that it would be the last one. "The whole world (Verse 4) wondered after the beast and they worshiped the dragon that gave power to the beast. And they worshiped the beast saying, 'who is like the beast? Who can possibly make war with him?'"

We now have a military power and the whole world wondering after the beast. Now historically in our tradition of prophetic interpretation, we tended to look at this thing and say, well we follow Rome all the way up into Europe. We see Rome in Hitler's attempt to resurrect the Roman Empire, an attempt that nearly succeeded as a matter of fact, and was really a very closely run thing-a lot closer than most people realize. We have tended to see, as we approach the time of the end, that everybody's looking to see those ten nations coming together. They are looking to see the rising economic power of the beast. There is sort of the assumption that all this stuff is going to come together in a slow and gradual way, but what if this deadly wound were a complete collapse of what was being built. That is as Europe began to build itself into this colossus that everybody was watching for and looking for and expecting to come into existence out of the Roman Empire. If as it came to that place, it fell into complete and total economic collapse and ruin. You do understand don't you, subsequent to WWI, that even though there were very heavy reparations put upon Germany, Germany was recovering. During that period of time the universities were flourishing, art was flourishing, music was flourishing. Germany was moving ahead and although they had the terrible burden of reparations upon them, they were making it. It was not the reparations; it was not WWI that wiped out Germany. It was the Great Depression of 1929. It was that, that destroyed the German economy, that led to bread lines, that led to millions of people out of work and eventually brought Adolph Hitler to power. What is suggested in Revelation 13, I think, is not a slow developing, growing beast, but a beast that was on its way and was wounded to death and everybody thought it was finished, but because someone came along and pulled it together, it was healed and came back and everyone stared at this beast with open-mouthed amazement. The whole world wondered at the beast and they worshiped the beast and the dragon that gave it its power, the supernatural things, whatever they were that came along, and they said who can make war with this beast?

"And there was given unto him (Verse 5) a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given him to continue forty-two months." Now that's pretty specific. This is a decree of God that at the end time this one is going to be given this power and it will last for forty-two months. "He opened his mouth (Verse 6) in blasphemy against God; he blasphemed His name and His tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven." Why in the world is this thing blaspheming God's tabernacle? And is there one? Apparently there is at the very end time. Why is he so focused upon the Jews? On Jerusalem? On a tabernacle? On a temple if there should be one? There does not have to be a temple by the way. A tabernacle would serve to be a holy place, which is basically what the prophecies are about. "It was given to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and power was given him over kindred and tongues and nations." There is no way in this context to be absolutely certain, right here, whether when he says given power over the holy ones (the saints,) which is what that means, he means over Christians or Jews. Who are the holy ones, that is the nation of God out of Israel that might be referred to in those terms? There is no way of knowing, and it might mean both, for all that's concerned.

"And all who dwell upon the earth (Verse 8) will worship him, whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man has an ear to hear, let him hear." Now once again, don't try to interpret prophecy in mid-air. Take a look at history; take a look at the framework; do the homework, as it were; get the basics right before you start to interpret these prophecies. Personally, I'm pretty well persuaded, although I try to keep an open mind on all these things, that what we're going to see developing is a super-power in Europe, but that economic collapse will come along, and I say economic; I don't see any other type that would bring the chaos necessary for this type of thing to take place. There will come a point in time when these kings will actually give their power one hour to this beast. They will do so voluntarily because it is their only hope of economic survival. Now watch the world around you and when you see these things going on, whether or not this is the one that will bring it all together, no one can possibly say.

Jesus was very explicit about the end time, about trying to figure out the day or the hour, and He says nobody knows that; you can forget about that. He said blessed is that servant when his master has given him a job when he will come back and find him actually doing the job.

That part of our task is clear enough of what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to watch and pray. One of the things, I think we need to be very careful about, we need to watch what's going on around us in the world. I'm very struck when I talk with people, interact with people, how little real attention people are paying to what's going on. How little they really grasp of what is happening. I remember a time when in our clubs and what have you, one of the things we tried to do was to keep in touch. We'd have a little quiz every once in awhile, to find out things like who is the Chancellor of Germany, who is Secretary General of the United Nations, and take off on all these things just to have this as part of our homework to keep track of what was happening. Who's doing what and why they are doing it, the politics that are going on among nations, which formed the grist, as it were, of the mill of the fulfillment of these prophecies which we have been wondering about all of our lives, and studied and thought about and tried to understand what God is doing. We're going to see some pretty startling things

happen in the future, and the brittleness of the world economic order ought to be apparent to all of us, now shouldn't it? If it's not apparent to you, I submit that you're not paying attention. The world order right now, the financial world order, is extremely brittle, and it could crack, and the cracks could lead to disaster. People talked about the Y2K problem as though it were going to be precipitating some huge problem in this country, but the Y2K problem was a pimple compared to the problem that exists in the overinflated, over-extended world markets. The situation is dangerous in the world economy. It's fragile and in fact all the knowledgeable people make it clear that it's a bubble and bubbles have a way of breaking.

Pay attention; Jesus said watch. We should be watching; we should be attentive; we should know what's going on around us, because in such a time as we think not, the son of man will come. I'm not a person to cry wolf, so I'm very careful about many of these things, as no doubt you've noticed from time to time, but I have a sense that we're in a convergence zone, as it were, right now. That an awful lot of things are beginning to converge, beginning to take shape, that could lead us into some of the events that we read about in the book of Revelation. So watching and praying and staying close to God and paying attention to what is happening in the world at large, I think is very important.

One final caution - be really careful about writing up detailed prophetic scenarios about what you think is going to happen in the future. I can tell you for sure the more detail you put in it, the more certain you are to be wrong. Be sure you know what the Bible says. Look at the history. Look at what's happened in the past and wait for God to grant you understanding of what's about to happen.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: "Prophecy: The Basics" (9843) 11/14/98
Transcribed by: jh

Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly
on his Born to Win radio program.

You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

www.borntowin.net