

Bible Prophecy And End Times

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John Jones

It may seem strange that a person could go from consciously following Satan to being a spiritually reborn Christian in just one instant of time, through the preaching of only one bible verse and via someone not even walking with God themselves; yet that is exactly how I was saved.

After a year's downhill slide into alcohol, drugs, crime and eventually madness (perhaps even demonic possession), God simply reached down and plucked me out of the pit. All the rushing, the shifting sands of personality, outrageous pride and crazy thinking were swept aside in a moment and replaced with complete stillness, peace and soundness of mind. And I knew right then that the God of the bible, the very one I had never believed even existed, was indeed God. Afterwards I wasn't able to recall the words my friend had spoken, though I knew he had said something simultaneous to God's spirit coming upon me. However I did ask him later the same evening what he'd said and he replied that he'd just responded to my words (which I think were highly blasphemous) by saying, "John, we never know the day nor the hour", by which he meant 'the day or hour of the Lord's return'. (While he may have been very much separated from God in his lifestyle, he'd been raised in a Christian family and did believe.)

After that, eighteen years passed during which I married a Christian girl with a tremendously kind heart and genuine faith, received the very great blessing of four wonderful children, absorbed God's word through much bible reading, got involved in a range of informal ministries, was convicted NOT to go to bible college, experienced up's and downs in my walk yet slowly matured in consistency, and also came to really appreciate what you might call "the ordinary Christian life". Throughout most of that time I read and studied a lot, first just to understand the basics of the faith, then to delve deeper into God's word. About a year into being a Christian I decided to read up on the subject of prophecy, my simple thought being that if prophecy taught us what God planned to do in the future then I wanted to know about that. I never really intended this study to span more than a few months and certainly had no idea that it would become a particular interest from that time on. All I wanted to achieve was to understand for myself, out of the word of God, the teaching of the Church I was in (which taught a classic evangelical pre-millennial & pre-tribulation rapture based view of prophecy). Now most of it really did make good sense, but one or two parts not only seemed a bit speculative, but also some of the supporting verses for them appeared to be getting used out of context. I guess it was trying to dig out the truth on these matters that drew me much deeper into

the topic than intended. Interestingly enough it seldom occurred to me that the words spoken at the moment of my conversion were in any way significant to God's calling. Only recently have I really started to wonder if my interest in prophecy has more behind it than just a personal fascination. Anyway, after years of testing various prophetic views against the word, and also just repeatedly rereading prophetic passages trying to grasp how they fitted together, I eventually started to gain more and more clarity on the subject. In about 2005 I started collecting some thoughts on paper, then later wrote a few notes aimed at teaching my children and a couple of their cousins. Later I added some more sections for a bible study I ran for a while and the material started to build up. Realizing that I had a decent pile of notes I then hashed them together into an eBook which got a about 10,000 downloads in its first year online. However even at that point I was unsure about the project, still asking God for re-assurance that I was on the right track, or for correction if I wasn't.

The real turning point towards this becoming a more serious project was when I went to a church leadership conference in 2010. Though not cessationist I am not at all Pentecostal in church background so I was not particularly wired to expect what occurred there. You see I was praying earnestly for guidance that day, praying that God would show me where to invest my time and energies and how to be fruitful for him. At one particular point in the day this book project came to mind and I was really struggling with whether there was any value in taking it further. First, despite believing myself to be on the right track with prophecy, how could I really be sure? Second, most people didn't seem very interested in the subject. Third, I knew it would be a lot of extra work to complete to a reasonable standard and wondered if this was really the best use of my time. So I was praying hard about it and eventually just said to the Lord, "I really don't want to do this unless it's of you. If it's not I'll just dump it – no questions, just show me what you want". So after really placing the matter in God's hands like this the next prayer offered up in the room struck me like a thunderbolt. A man on the other side of the room was praying out loud saying that the Lord was telling him that someone in the room was thinking of writing a book and that the Lord wanted to say to that person "Just go ahead and do it, this work is of Me and I am with you". (Shortened version, I didn't write down his exact words.) In seeking out the person who had prayed this afterwards I have to admit I partly wanted to make sure they weren't a nutter or something, but the guy turned out to be a humble, grounded and mature servant of the Lord who had just felt this impressed strongly on his mind to say. Looking back I very much doubt that I would have continued with the project if it wasn't for this remarkable encouragement.

Despite receiving further reassurances myself in prayer concerning this work as a whole I do not claim to be right about everything. However I do believe that what I've put together represents the

clearest, least overworked, most directly “fallen out of the pages of the bible” interpretation of prophecies related to end times. Most of all though I want to emphasize to readers that the one thing I am really certain of is that some aspects of the unfolding of prophecy will take everyone by surprise and that, while we can know a lot in advance, many of the details will only become completely clear when fulfilled. For this reason I stress that we must all keep somewhat of an open mind and not be locked into rigid denominational or personal perspectives.

I really would value your feedback, both encouragement and constructive criticism, so if you have any thoughts that arise from reading this book please feel free to email me at **john@straightforwardprophecy.com**.

FOUNDATIONS

A significant foundational prophecy appears to be infused into words spoken by the Lord right back in the Garden of Eden. Consider whether God had a secondary meaning in mind as he pronounced his curse on the serpent saying:

... "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

(Gen 3:14-15)

That last sentence must certainly be taken as prophetic, even if only concerning the future conflict between mankind and serpents. How many times since then have people been bitten on the feet by snakes? And how often have people protected themselves by crushing a snake's head? But surely there is more to the verse's meaning than this mundane interpretation. Since Satan was personified in the serpent, wasn't God alluding to something of much greater significance. In the verse God says that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, while the serpent would bruise his heel. Some translations use the word "strike", which is probably a more accurate depiction; snakes strike rather than bruise. The most direct interpretation of this verse is that it's prophetic concerning Satan and the Messiah. Satan would strike the seed of the woman (the one born of a virgin), inflicting a fatal injury, nevertheless in that same event the seed of the woman would destroy the power of the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15), ultimately crushing him completely. Alternatively, if we take "the seed of the woman" to refer to mankind in general then it seems reasonable to take from it that God may have been telling Adam and Eve, right back at the fall, that Satan would afflict the human race but that a descendant of theirs would ultimately crush Satan's head. There's not enough biblical evidence to cast these interpretations in stone, but it's beautiful to consider that even at that dark moment in time, even as the very curses due to sin were being pronounced, God was also revealing the future redemption of mankind.

WHAT IS PROPHECY?

From these Genesis chapter 3 verses we gain some insights into the topic of prophecy more generally. First we see that prophecy is God revealing some aspect of the future, either blatantly or subtly. Secondly, we see that in some cases prophecy can have layers of interrelated interpretation; or may even reveal not just an event but a pattern. (Over and over the relationship between mankind and serpents was to be played out.) Thirdly we see that prophecy often uses symbolic language; though we'll find as we go on that most symbols are specifically defined, or reasonably clear in their meaning, from cross-referencing other passages.

All up prophecy is an amazing treasure; revealing the future, the spiritual patterns of this world and also at times challenging and convicting us. The threads of prophecy run through the vast majority of books in the bible; indeed God's prophetic plan actually forms the very superstructure on which everything else hangs. Therefore it follows that if we do not understand prophecy correctly then we can't fully understand the biblical story of God's work with mankind. On the other hand it is true to say that if we don't genuinely, and as little children, believe the bible then we will not rightly understand prophecy. Prophecy is a mystery that is specifically hidden from that natural man, the purpose of which no doubt is to avoid the revelations from distorting the unfolding of the future events they speak of.

HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH PROPHECY?

The principle of scripture being hidden to worldly wisdom is broadly illustrated by what Jesus said of his own teaching:

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight.

(Luke 10:21)

This is a recurring principal in the New Testament; effectively telling us that the revelation of the mysteries of God cannot be understood by intellectual powers alone. In fact, over intellectualizing Christ's teachings can quickly take away their obvious meaning and replace it with the foolishness of mans reasoning. While some understanding of context and the culture of the times is definitely helpful to our understanding, we also need to make sure we keep that which is simple simple. We must come to Christ with plainness of thought and readiness of heart like a small child, along with the childlike humility to know we need the father, and that we need his Holy Spirit to enlighten us.

This is true for most of what Jesus taught, our approach to the bible as a whole, and in particular to our understanding of prophecy.

Sadly though, far from being generally Holy Spirit led, prophecy has the distinction of being the most abused topic in the bible. While mankind has abused every topic of the bible in the pursuit of his own vain thinking, prophecy stands out in that unlike other topics it is subject to a lot of misuse even within otherwise sound, bible believing and spiritual Christian circles. Hype, speculation passed off as fact and mistaken context have often been not just accepted but swallowed without discernment. Excessive excitement has allowed notions in that would have been exposed and thrown out if applied to any other area of bible teaching. What is the essential fault? The number one culprit would appear to be that of trying to get more detail out of prophecy than what God has made knowable in advance. Prophecy may predict many aspects of the future but one of its greatest purposes, in times past and for times yet future, is of providing those living in the days of actual prophetic fulfillments with an understanding of the times and seasons they are in. Many exact details are not really knowable beforehand, but can only be fully understood as they come to pass. This is easily demonstrated by the prophecies fulfilled in Jesus first coming. Some were utterly predictable from what was revealed beforehand in the Old Testament, such as the Messiah being born in Bethlehem. Others would never have been guessed, like the future prophetic significance of God saying that he had “called his son out of Egypt”. In its original context this was speaking of Israel coming out of its time of slavery in Egypt, but we discover by its use in the New Testament that it also foreshadowed the fact that Jesus, much like his nation, would spend his early years in Egypt before returning to the land of Israel. So bearing in mind previous abuses, especially the tendency to see more than is actually revealed in advance, one of the objectives of this study is to stick to a clear, biblical and un-hyped approach to prophecy.

THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

Now, when you build a house it’s good to start with the foundations. So it is with prophecy; laying the foundation correctly goes a long way towards ending up with a stable and coherent result. With this in mind let’s take a look at one of the key foundational prophecies contained in the bible, the Genesis account of God’s promises to Abraham.

Now the Lord had said to Abram, “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

(Genesis 12:1-3)

God calls a man, Abraham. He blesses him and promises to make him a great nation. From this we know the pathway that God’s blessing flowed down at that time. When it was spoken it was prediction, but for us it’s now a validation that God’s hand was in a special way behind the nation that eventuated. We also discover in the passage that God set up an enduring pattern, a principal concerning Israel – “those who bless you I will bless, those who curse you I will curse”. One of the beauties of understanding prophecy is the opportunity to align with God’s will. Israel exists in the world today, so should we bless it or curse it? Hopefully Christians will bless it with the same blessing that it originally blessed us with, the knowledge of Messiah. That God’s blessing to the gentiles would come through the Messiah of Israel, the descendant of Abraham, was also pointed towards in the very verses we’re looking at here when God said to Abraham, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”. So, far from being surprised when they realized that God had opened the way of life to the Gentiles the apostles should almost have expected it, both from this and many other Old Testament passages that one way or another made the same prediction.

HAS GOD FINISHED WITH ISRAEL?

Unfortunately you don’t go far into prophecy without stumbling on controversy. In this case the key issue is that some suggest God has now cut off his blessings from Israel, from Abraham’s seed, and given them to the “spiritual children of Abraham”, the church. They claim that this has come about due to Israel’s national rejection of their Messiah. Proponents of what is often called “Replacement Theology” may justify this idea by pointing to Romans 11:17 which says that some of the natural branches were broken off from the root and fatness of the olive tree that the gentiles might be grafted in. They may also point out that Galatians 3:7 says that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith, and other verses that appear to support their position. Certainly a rational argument can be built to support this point of view, yet it is plainly not biblical when taking into account the fullness of God’s word.

For instance, in Romans 11 Paul says:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

(Romans 11:25-26)

This passage, following the section about the branches being broken off, would have been the perfect opportunity for Paul to explain Replacement Theology, but instead he does the opposite. He tells us that the blindness of Israel nationally will only continue until the fullness of the gentiles have been gathered, and that Israel will then be grafted back in. In explaining this he refers back to Isaiah.

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the Lord.

"As for Me," says the Lord, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."

(Isaiah 59:20-21)

Paul interprets these verses as being yet future to his time, not part of the blessings to the church or something that happened at the time of Christ's first advent, but something that will occur in the future concerning the redeemer coming to the literal children of Israel.

In addition to failing to believe this plain declaration on the matter in Romans, supporters of Replacement Theology end up having to teach that all the Old Testament promises made specifically to Israel now have to be re-interpreted as "spiritual" promises towards the church. This means that portions of the Old Testament that once had a clear literal meaning to the Israelites, and formed much of the basis of their national identity and hope, are assigned a completely different meaning. John Calvin sells this approach to "spiritualizing" the book of Isaiah this way:

Now the Prophets hold out those things which relate to the present life, and borrow metaphors from them; but it is in order that they may teach us to rise higher and to embrace eternal and blessed life.

We must not fix our whole attention on these transitory blessings, but must make use of them as ladders, that, being raised to heaven, we may enjoy eternal and immortal blessings.

(John Calvin¹)

This sounds great, but in essence what he is saying is that we can't take the prophets words literally. But if we can't take their words to mean what even the prophets themselves appear to have believed them to mean, what value are their words to us at all? Doesn't it just leave the field wide open to interpret them in whatever way suits us? The early reformers may have done a great thing in breaking away from the darkness of Catholicism, but we have to realize that they could only see so far. They were so embedded in a Roman Catholic mindset that there were limits to how far they could shift their thinking in that first big step of the reformation.

The key point in covering this issue is to clarify that promises to Israel will never in this study be redefined as now being towards the church. God made both unconditional and conditional promises to Israel at different times in the past. The unconditional promises must be fulfilled, for God cannot lie. The conditional promises have been, and are being, fulfilled or not fulfilled according to Israel's keeping or breaking of their conditions. But even when it comes to the conditional promises, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled towards Israel, they are still not transferable to the church via clever twists of theology.

WHY STUDY PROPHECY?

Even in just introducing this study of prophecy we have already touched on controversy and the abuse of the subject itself, therefore it's no wonder some people just want to avoid the topic like the plague. And yet it is probably more relevant and timely today than at any time since Christ's ascension, for truly one of the remarkable things about the time we are living in is the growing social consciousness of our nearness to end times. And although this consciousness is expressed via some rather diverse perspectives, it still seems poignant that the sum total of many voices is that some kind of end times is near. In amongst the diverse mix are those who refer to the Mayan prophetic calendar, Nostradamus followers, Christians, Muslims, New Age teachers and even total atheists who worry about horrific world scenarios. Speaking from just about every shade in the spectrum of beliefs, it seems that the voices of multitudes are combining to warn that mankind stands on the brink. Plenty of world issues could be highlighted to suggest this, but there's something more to it

than that. It appears that somewhere in the collective total of the facts and information swirling around us many have simply developed a gut feeling that we really are on the verge of a great time of testing.

So given all the opinions and superstition that abound in the world, it's important that Christians really know how to rightly divide the word of truth, how to give a clear account of Gods plan amongst all the confusion, and how to discern true prophetic fulfillments from false. Will there be false fulfillments? It would seem so. For example, II Thessalonians 2:9 tells us that the Antichrist will come with "all signs and lying wonders". This is not conclusive on its own but we'll see as we go on that there are strong indicators that Antichrist will probably be hailed by many as the Christ and touted as fulfilling (incorrectly interpreted) biblical prophecies² concerning Christ and his kingdom. This abominable deception cannot arise out of nowhere. Rather the foundations of deception have to be laid first, and indeed they are already being laid. It's easy to keep on just living life without lifting our heads to see the great deception that's developing in the world around us, or the darkness starting to overshadow the land. But if ever there was a day for Christians to be alert, students of prophecy and of God's word as a whole, it is surely today. That's the motivation behind preparing this study; to help those who desire understanding to get a clear grasp of the most immediately relevant and essential themes of bible prophecy.

While reasonably straight forward, the material that follows is quite condensed so in many places it is best read slowly, with reflection, and ideally in combination with reading the bible chapters and verses being referenced. All bible quotations are from the NKJV³ (due to the richness and power of that translations wording), however some readers may well prefer following them in an NIV⁴ or other simplified version in order to assist understanding.

EMPIRES IN PROPHECY

Daniel chapters 2 & 7

One of the key themes of prophecy is the progression of human government and its eventual replacement with the government of Jesus Christ over the whole earth. While this theme is woven into many parts of the Old Testament, nowhere is it so clearly revealed as in the book of Daniel. Daniel received a series of visions from God that are perhaps the greatest treasure chest on the subject of any book in the bible except Revelation itself. Primarily the book of Daniel deals with four great empires that each had power over the Holy Land, and that also collectively form the spiritual, cultural and governmental foundations of modern western civilization.

EMPIRES RISING

Over six hundred years before Christ, an ancient power was rousing itself in the Middle East. Babylon, the fountain head of idolatrous worship and occult “mystery religions”, with its eyes on Egypt, started pushing west from its base in an area within what we now call Iraq towards the areas now known as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. It was rising up to become a powerful empire that ultimately would encompass all the lands from Israel to the eastern parts of Persia (Iran)¹. Pushing first into Assyria and then down into Israel, it was set to fulfill the prophecies of Jeremiah concerning a power that God would raise up against Israel.

Then the LORD said to me:

“Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. For behold I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” says the LORD;

“They shall come and each one set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.

(Jeremiah 1:14-15)

By about 606BC the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II, had brought Jerusalem into submission by way of a military siege and taken captive back to Babylon a number of the finest Hebrew teenagers to be trained for service in his royal court. Amongst these was Daniel who became the author of the book of Daniel.

Daniel and three of his friends were notable for maintaining their Hebrew faith even in the very tempting environment of elite Babylonian society. Because they kept themselves pure and followed God with their whole heart God used these men as chosen vessels of gold to serve him. To Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego God gave miraculous deliverance from the fiery furnace, which became a testimony to the whole empire (Ch.3). To Daniel God gave wisdom, understanding and visions concerning many events that would take place in his time and into the future. Some of his visions extend even beyond the first coming of Jesus to the last days on earth before the greatest day in biblical prophecy, “the day of the Lord”, often referred to by Christians as “the second coming of Christ”.

Yet the first prophecies in the book of Daniel were not given to Daniel directly, but through the great king, Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar received the prophecy in a dream, but when he awoke, although he perceived that it had been a prophetic dream it slipped out of his mind and he couldn't remember it². This was how it came about that he gave the astounding command that the wise men of Babylon had to tell him the dream, and explain it to him, or else be put to death. Of course they all complained loudly that no king had ever asked such a thing and that no magician or wise man could know what another person had dreamt. Daniel and his friends also knew that this was outside the power of man, so they set to praying earnestly that God would reveal it to them. God answered their prayers by appearing to Daniel in a night vision, showing him both the king's dream and the interpretation of it.

The dream was of a great statue, exceedingly bright but also terrifying. It's head was of gold, it's chest and arms of silver, it's belly and thighs of brass, it's legs were made of iron and its feet of a mix of iron and clay (perhaps like pottery). In the vision a stone was cut out without hands and struck the great statue on the feet smashing them. Then the whole statue disintegrated into tiny pieces that the wind blew away, and the rock carved out without hands became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. Daniel explained to the king that the statue represented four world empires, of which his empire was the first, the head of gold. He then told the king that after his empire would come another empire, inferior in some way to Nebuchadnezzar's. This next empire was represented by the chest and arms of silver and actually came into being later in the book of Daniel during the time

when Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar is on the throne. Later in chapter 5 of the book of Daniel, we read that Belshazzar threw a great party and decided to use the holy vessels stolen from God's temple in Jerusalem to drink wine out of. But then suddenly, during his party, Belshazzar saw a ghostly hand write on the wall and with his face pale and his knees knocking he called for someone to interpret it. None of his magicians or wise men could, however the queen suggested he call Daniel for she said that in the time of Belshazzar's father the wisdom of the gods was found in him. Daniel was then called and interpreted the writing as saying that God had numbered Belshazzar's kingdom and finished it, and that Belshazzar himself had been judged and found lacking. The writing also said that his kingdom had been given to the Medes and the Persians. Indeed shortly after this the armies of the Medes and Persians conquered both the city of Babylon and the whole Babylonian empire. The first king of the new (Persian) empire³ was Darius the Mede, and the second was Cyrus the Persian. Although Daniel said that the empire that came after Babylon would be inferior, it was actually larger in size. The inferiority may therefore have referred to the power of the king. For whereas Nebuchadnezzar had total power, we find out in the story of Daniel and the lion's den (Ch. 6) that king Darius could not change his commandment once he had signed it. If you know the story, you may remember that once he realized that his decree meant throwing Daniel to the lions he was very sorry about having made it and wanted to change his mind, yet was unable to do so. We see then that in the Persian Empire, even the emperor had some restrictions on what he could do due to a form of constitutional law called 'the law of the Medes and Persians'. So it's probably in this respect that the power of the latter empire was inferior to the absolute power Nebuchadnezzar wielded in Babylon.

The third empire described by Daniel in response to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 is the one of brass, which from history we know was geographically even bigger again, ruling over the Middle East, most of Europe, North Africa and the areas we now call Afghanistan and Pakistan. This was the Grecian empire established by Alexander the Great⁴. Alexander became king of Macedonia when he was only 20 years old and during the following thirteen years conquered the whole Persian Empire and some territories beyond. Shortly after, at only 33 years of age, Alexander died and his kingdom was divided amongst his top four generals. Thus for most of its history the Grecian empire existed as four separate regions which often warred one with another.

The next kingdom to arise and conquer the territories belonging first to Babylonia, then Persia then Greece was the Roman Empire which was still quite new in its existence when Jesus was born in Bethlehem during the reign of the first Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus⁵. Of this fourth kingdom Daniel says that it would be as strong as iron but that its feet and toes would be iron mixed with clay,

suggesting perhaps something hard yet weak or brittle in some way. The latter form of the fourth kingdom, represented by the toes made of iron mixed with clay, appear to be yet future because it is at the time of this last kingdom that according to the prophetic dream of the king, “the stone carved out without hands” strikes the statue on the feet and destroys it. Daniel again provided the interpretation, which was that God will destroy the last kingdom of man and establish his own kingdom that will rule over all the earth. One thing that is quite clear is that God has not yet destroyed the corrupt and violent governments of man, nor has he yet established his own government of righteousness and equity over the earth.

Collectively these prophecies, based on the king's vision of the great statue, span from about 600BC to the time of Christ and also to a future time represented by the kingdom of iron mixed with clay. It is worth remembering that the Roman Empire was never really defeated. It broke up due to a combination of external attacks and internal rebellions and successions. Although the religious authority of popery became known as "The Holy Roman Empire", this was not really an empire in the true sense as it did not actually govern the lands over which it wielded influence. Today the countries that came out of the Roman empire include the UK to the far west, France, Germany, Italy and most of the other countries of Europe as well as Turkey, most of the middle eastern nations and parts of North African nations such as Libya and Egypt. Since the disintegration of the Roman Empire there has been no overarching empire covering all of these parts of the world. However the cultural and spiritual influences of the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian and Roman empires live on, especially in western society.

THE EXCEEDINGLY DREADFUL BEAST

So, as we've seen, the prophecy of the great image (idol) spans prophetically significant kingdoms from the time of Daniel right through to the end of the kingdoms of man. Another passage of similar scope is found in Daniel chapter seven, which picks up the same theme, but deals with it from a slightly different angle.

I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.

“And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.”

(Daniel 7:2-3)

'Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth.

(Daniel 7:17)

This vision, like Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Great Image in Daniel chapter 2, covers the four prophetically significant world empires that would arise out of "the great sea" of mankind. Of particular importance is that it provides the vital connection between these prophecies in Daniel, and the prophecies of the final beast in Revelation. It also focuses in on the "different" and "exceedingly dreadful" beast that has teeth of iron and nails of bronze (v19).

The first three empires in the prophecy are in this passage given the characteristics of animals. Babylon is like a lion with eagle's wings, but its wings are plucked off and it is made to stand on its feet and a man's heart is given to it. (Commentators believe the reference to being "given a man's heart" relates to Daniel chapter four which is the testimony of king Nebuchadnezzar who clearly came to be a believer in the Most High God.) The passage goes on to characterize the Persian Empire as being like a bear, and the Grecian Empire like a Leopard with four wings on its back and four heads. The Leopard with four wings may speak of the remarkable speed of its conquest, while the four heads almost undoubtedly predict it being split into four regions, each with its own king, which occurred after Alexander's death.

Lastly a fourth beast arises:

"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the other beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

(Daniel 7:7)

...I watched until the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame.

(Daniel 7:11)

Daniel is greatly troubled by this vision and seeks to know the truth about the fourth beast that was different from all the others (7:19). The beginning of the answer is:

'The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces.'

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