

THE COMING CAESAR

by Ray C. Stedman

We are considering together the remarkable predictions of the prophet Daniel dealing with the events on earth just before the return of Jesus Christ to establish his kingdom. I must emphasize that in these studies our part is not to prophesy but to interpret. We can make no certain timetable of events. Although there are many signs of our day which make us feel that the events of Daniel 7 may occur within the lifetime of any of us here, nevertheless we have to recognize also that these events may be delayed for several centuries. No one can predict with exactness as to time.

As the title of our series suggests, this is an outline of the future. All the prophets do is touch upon the highlights of history, but it is impossible to tell how much time elapses between the events that are predicted. This is clearly evident in the Scriptures. Although there are certain time schedules given, they concern themselves with very limited areas and begin only after certain precise events have occurred. We shall see one of these time schedules in this seventh chapter of Daniel, but in general there is no tight chronology on these matters.

Let us turn now to the prediction of one of the great figures of all time, foretold in many places in the Scripture, and even by Jesus himself. All that we have seen in Daniel so far, in some sense, has been leading to the revelation of this strange and sinister being, who is called in the Scriptures, the Antichrist. We shall cover the last half of the seventh chapter of Daniel which falls into three natural divisions. There are, first, in Verses 15-18, a general interpretation of the strange beasts which Daniel saw in his vision; Verses 19-22 recapitulate what we have already seen concerning the fourth beast of the series; then from Verse 23 through the rest of the chapter there is a specialized interpretation of the fourth beast.

Let us look now at the first division:

"As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious and the vision of my head alarmed me. I approached One of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever.'"
{Dan 7:15-18 RSV}

For the first time in this chapter we learn the personal reaction of the prophet to this strange series of night visions. He is understandably alarmed and puzzled by them. He sees them as portending certain tremendous events to come though he does not know how soon, and he is puzzled as to what their meaning may be. We learn here of the presence of an interpreting angel to whom Daniel comes to ask about these events. In Chapter 9 we are told whom this angel is. There Daniel tells us that he is Gabriel, the very same angel who was later sent by God to announce the birth of Jesus to both Joseph and Mary, as recorded in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke. Gabriel seems to have some special responsibility as interpreter and announcer of events, and he appears here in that capacity to Daniel.

There are two things that Gabriel highlights in this strange vision of the four beasts arising out of the sea. One is that the four beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. Now the phrase, "shall arise," makes clear that the historical interpretation of this passage -- which links it to the rise of Babylon, followed by Medo-Persia, then by Greece, and then Rome -- is in error, for all four of these are yet to arise after Daniel saw the vision. We know from the first verse of this chapter that Daniel saw the vision almost at the close of the Babylonian empire. Rather than just arising, it had already been world ruler for a great many years. That helps to confirm what we saw last time, that this is a vision of four great nations, all contemporaneous, occupying the Mediterranean area just before the return of Jesus Christ. The vision concerns, therefore, the last days of Gentile rule.

The second thing the angel highlighted is that the ultimate end is the establishment of the promised kingdom of God. History does not end in destruction; it goes on to reconstruction. This final kingdom was decreed by the Ancient of Days (another name for God himself), and, in this strange vision in Verses 13-14, to whom world dominion is granted. Unquestionably, this is one of the places where we have in the Old Testament a clear presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Linked with him is a group of people called "the saints of the Most High." This is a new element. The angel adds in the interpretation that which was not mentioned in the vision itself. These saints of the Most High are to receive the kingdom. Notice they do not take it themselves. It is the Son of man who comes and takes the kingdom, but then he gives it to the saints of the Most High who join him in ruling over the earth.

With this as an introduction, we come to the fourth beast. Interest centers now on this strange ten-horned beast that is the fourth of the series which Daniel saw arising out of the sea, and especially the eleventh horn which arises after the first ten. Daniel asks particularly concerning this beast:

"Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrible, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze; and which devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet; and concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up and before which three of them fell, the horn which had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and which seemed greater than its fellows. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and the judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom." {Dan 7:19-22 RSV}

All of this we have seen before, except for one new element which is added by Daniel. He says that the horn which grew up "made war with the saints and prevailed against them." This had not been included in the vision. From it we learn that the time of these four nations arising together will be a time of great and intense religious persecution, a time when war will be made against the saints, and quite successfully. The beast will prevail against them. Doubtless this links closely with what Jesus himself says, as recorded in Matthew 24, speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives just before his crucifixion:

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." {Matt 24:9-14 RSV}

I tie these passages together in order that you may see that this is not merely an obscure prediction from an Old Testament prophet, but has been confirmed to us and re-emphasized by the Lord Jesus himself.

Moving on with the interpretation, in the closing section of this chapter, Verses 23-27, we have the angel's answer to Daniel's inquiry about the fourth beast. It is a detailed explanation of what the strange symbolism means and especially as regards the little horn which comes up last. Each verse of this section covers a stage of interpretation, so I shall take it verse by verse.

First, verse 23:

**"Then he said,
'As for the fourth beast,
there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth,
which shall be different from all the kingdoms,
and it shall devour the whole earth,
and trample it down, and break it to pieces.'" {Dan 7:23 RSV}**

This builds upon what we have already learned. We have summarized here the strange course of Roman sovereignty over the earth. The fourth kingdom began with the Roman empire, but, as the angel said to Daniel, it would be different from all other kingdoms. It is different because it is not a single nation dominating a great section of earth but it is a collection of nations. That is what marks the fourth kingdom as distinct. Remember that in Revelation 17 we were told also that the beast which appears there is made up of a multitude of nations and tongues and kingdoms. It is a collection of nations and languages, dominating the world by the power of certain ideals and principles characteristic of it.

Now it is time to ask ourselves some rather revealing questions: Why is it that in the course of history since our Lord's day, all of the world's trade languages have been Western? Beginning with Latin (the language of Rome itself) which superseded Greek as the trade language of the world, we then have the rise of the Spanish empire when Spanish was the trade language. It was replaced by French up to modern times, but now it is English, which is spoken all over the world as the language of commerce, trade, and diplomacy.

Why is it that these universally spoken languages have always been Roman and Western? Why is it that Western dress has become the standard all over the world in our own day! Instead of the dress and cultures of the East, it has been the West which has conquered in this area. Western dress is now standard even throughout the Orient.

Why is it also that Western technology has spread everywhere throughout the world? And why has the spread of Western civilization always resulted in the breaking up of indigenous cultures and has produced internal struggles among nations by industrializing them with all its inevitable accompaniment of congestion, pollution, and the ravaging of natural resources?

Is it not at least possible that this is what is meant by the phrase, "it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces? Surely this is very remarkable in the light of this strange prophecy. It seems quite clear that this fourth kingdom is indeed different from all the others that preceded it and has a strange and impressive effect upon the whole world.

In Verse 24 we learn something further:

**"As for the ten horns,
out of this kingdom
ten kings shall arise,
and another shall arise after them;
he shall be different from the former ones,
and shall put down three kings." {Dan 7:24 RSV}**

Here we have the final form of the fourth kingdom. The two great political changes which Scripture has long anticipated must occur before the return of Jesus Christ in glory, have been:

1. The restoration of the Jews to Palestine which has been predicted for centuries and has now been fulfilled, and
2. The ten-fold division of the Roman earth. It is emphasized in several Scriptures that this is to occur before the return of Jesus Christ.

There is a gradual development of this ten-fold division after it first appears. There are first ten kings who share power together in a confederation of sorts. Then an eleventh comes up, who is rather obscure and unpretentious at the first, but, by this eleventh, three of the first ten are overthrown or amalgamated, and finally all ten unite in giving their power and authority to the eleventh, the "little horn" mentioned here.

Now you cannot read this account without seeing that this "little horn" is an individual. He has, as Daniel said, "the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things." He is the final Caesar of the fourth kingdom. The Roman empire began with a series of Caesars who established a norm for dictatorship throughout all history. They symbolize supreme power vested in one individual. The "little horn" mentioned here will be the coming Caesar of the world.

Let us read on. In verse 25 we learn more.

**"He shall speak words against the Most High,
and shall wear out the saints of the Most High,
and shall think to change the times and the law;
and they shall be given into his hand
for a time, two times, and half a time." {Dan 7:25 RSV}**

Here is new information that we have not had before. There are four distinct, recognizable, factors that are brought out by the angel about this strange being:

First, he blasphemes and opposes God, he "speaks words against the Most High." Other Scriptures elsewhere suggest that he does not begin his career that way but after he comes into world power he begins to blaspheme God.

Second, he persecutes the saints and makes war against them, as Daniel has already been told. He is said here to "wear out the saints of the Most High." The Hebrew word that is used for "wear out" is a most remarkable word. It means literally "to afflict," and always with a mental application. It means, therefore, to afflict mentally, and it very strongly suggests the brain-washing techniques which are now being widely developed, using serums and drugs by which the mind, the thinking, is actually changed. Attempts are thus made to alter the entire character of an individual, through mental exhaustion and the use of mind-changing drugs to literally "afflict mentally" and thus "wear out" the saints.

Third, we read that he shall "think to change the times and the law." Now it is a little difficult to know exactly what it means, to change the times, because this is about the only reference to this activity that is given to us. But it at least suggests the possibility of a calendar revision, an attempt to change the dating of human events. Since this individual is clearly against God and opposed to the things of God, it is quite likely that what he will try to do is to eliminate the designation of human events by the present use of A.D., "in the year of our Lord," thus dating them from the time of Christ. It is apparently an attempt to change history and date it from some other event, thus eliminating the days of Christ as the hinge of history.

We read that he also attempts to change the law. This is not, laws, plural; it is singular, *the law*, which either implies the constitutions by which nations are basically governed, or, much more likely, an attempt to disregard natural law, to ignore the fundamental law of life, e.g., laws of sex, laws of society, laws of economics, etc. All this highlights the brashness of a man who dares to think of himself as the incarnation of all that men believe about God, and is thus able to change fundamental and basic law.

The last thing given to us here is that his time of power is limited. "They shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time." Elsewhere in Daniel we see what is meant by "a time." Nebuchadnezzar, in Chapter 4, was afflicted with insanity for "seven times." By that is meant seven years, so a "time" is a year. If we take a time, two times, and half a time, and add them together we have three and a half years. This is in exact agreement with predictions elsewhere in Scripture which limit the time of Antichrist's power to twelve hundred and sixty days, in one case, and in another, forty-two months, each of which is exactly the same period as three and a half years. These other passages were given at a widely differing period of time. thus confirming this limitation of power. It would be helpful at this point to see the parallelism which exists between Daniel and Revelation. In Revelation 13 we can see that the strange beast that John saw rising up out of the sea is closely parallel to what Daniel describes.

"And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw as like a leopard, its feet like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth." {Rev 13:1-2a RSV}

John's beast gathers together all the characteristics of the first three beasts of Daniel's vision. Now let us go on in Revelation 13:

"And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words..." {Rev 13:5a RSV}

See how clearly that accords with what Daniel says about the horn that had eyes like a man, and a mouth speaking great things. In Revelation we learn that those great things were "haughty and blasphemous words,"

"and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months [which is three and a half years]; it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God; blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven." Also it was allowed "to make war on the saints and to conquer them. [No question here as to identity, is there?] And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain." {Rev 13:5b-8 RSV}

Clearly we have an exact identification here with the little horn of Daniel 7.

Back in Daniel, we find in the last two verses of the chapter the doom of this beast recorded:

**"But the court shall sit in judgment,
and his dominion shall be taken away,
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.
And the kingdom and the dominion
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey them." {Dan 7:26-27 RSV}**

Daniel is told precisely "the court shall sit in judgment," i.e., the heavenly council will pass sentence upon this blasphemous, God-defying man. It is encouraging to see that man's evil is everywhere limited, he can only go so far. Paul gives us further detail on this in Second Thessalonians 2:7:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders [that is an important word to notice -- miraculous signs are no proof of God-given authentication; they can be satanic], and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {2 Th 2:7 RSV}

Thus we learn how the beast's dominion shall be taken away and eventually be given to the saints of the Most High.

With one voice Scripture points to the collapse of civilization as we know it before the return of Jesus Christ. The evil of man will be permitted to have such complete manifestation that it results in the rise of a single individual to whom all authority in the world is committed. As we look at our own day we are tempted to ask. Where are we in this scene? How close are we to these events? As I have already suggested, we can only be relative in our estimation of that. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to believe that these events are only around the corner. As you know today, even secular writers are predicting the rise of just such an individual. I was interested some time ago in a statement which appears in U.S. News and World Report:

The once optimistic hope of Americans for a well-ordered and a stable world is fading. Expenditures close to a trillion dollars have failed to provide stability. Rather, conditions have worsened. This appraisal indicates that among officials the prevailing view is gaining acceptance that frictions and world problems are becoming too deep seated to be solved, except by a strong hand from someplace.

Sir Winston Churchill, while still Prime Minister of Great Britain, speaking in Copenhagen, said this:

The creation of an authoritative, all-powerful world order is the ultimate aim toward which we must strive. Unless some effective world super-government can be brought quickly into action, the proposals for peace and human progress are dark and doubtful.

Everywhere today there are increasing signs, in many dimensions, that we are facing (and soon) an unprecedented world crisis, a crisis which we cannot avoid no matter how hard we try. It will involve not only politics but even the supply of food, the pollution of the atmosphere, and other ecological matters. Many of you have read the reports of Dr. Paul Ehrlich here at Stanford who is working on the problem of population explosion. He was asked recently a question, "In your book you also outlined other ways the planet is deteriorating: pollution of the oceans, pollution of the rivers and lakes (the death of Lake Erie, for example), pollution of the atmosphere, ruination of the land. It seems the world is deteriorating at a rapid rate. Do you agree?" Dr. Ehrlich replied, "That's exactly right. We are now at the stage where, if we have any hope of saving mankind and the world, we have to take immediate and drastic action on all kinds of fronts. We have got to start doing all the right things at this moment, just to give ourselves a decent fighting chance. But even this won't insure salvation."

With some misgivings, I want to share with you a remarkable prediction by the famous prophetess of our day, Jeane Dixon. I want to make it clear that I do not endorse Jeane Dixon. I believe that the source of her knowledge is demonic and therefore cannot be trusted, although it has an amazing record of accuracy. That is part of what constitutes it so deceptive. We must remember that the Scriptures make clear that the powers of darkness have a vested interest in the appearance and the ultimate acceptance of a world ruler, therefore they will be active to prepare the way for the coming and acceptance of such a one. One of Jeane Dixon's most startling predictions is this:

A child born somewhere in the Middle East shortly after 7:00 A.M. on February 5, 1962, will revolutionize the world. Before the close of the century he will bring together all mankind in one all-embracing faith. This will be the foundation of a new Christianity, with every sect and creed united through this man, who will walk among the people to spread the wisdom of the almighty power. Mankind will begin to feel the great force of this man in the early 1980's, and during the subsequent years the world as we know it will be reshaped and revamped into one without wars or suffering. His power will grow greatly until 1999, at which time the peoples of this earth will probably discover the full meaning of the vision.

Her interpretation of this man is to see him as the one great hope of the world and the answer to the prayers of men. The fact that she sees this individual as a blessing to mankind helps to confirm our suspicion that the source of her information is demonic. For in the light of Scripture, this coming world ruler is no blessing at all, although he will first appear in that light. But he is not really a blessing; he is the greatest the world has ever known though he will appear to offer a way out of world chaos. Distrust the dates that are given in Miss Dixon's predictions because we are no more authorized to set dates for the appearance of Antichrist than we are for the appearance of Jesus Christ.

But one thing is clear, and I do not think this can be questioned. We do not today (and probably never shall) live in what we could call normal times. The world is fast approaching a crisis. All voices agree together, secular and sacred alike, that we are coming to an unprecedented time of trouble in the world, and we shall never again see anything that could be regarded as normal times. Dr. Ehrlich tells us that in the 1970's the world will begin to experience great famines, which are absolutely inescapable. He sees no solution, no way to avoid the great famines that will decimate whole nations in the 1970's. This, along with the increasing pollution of atmosphere, the congestion of our cities, the rise and spread of violence, all points to the soon appearing of some remarkable individual who will seem to offer a way out.

My question to us is this: What should we Christians do in view of all this? Or better, perhaps, the question should be: What should we Christians be?

You remember that is the very thing Peter asks after he describes the culmination of human events. He says, "What manner of persons ought you to be in the light of these things?" {cf, 2 Pet 3:11}. The Scripture tells us that we are not children of darkness. That is, these things are not to come upon us unexpectedly, nor are we to act like others with regard to them. We are children of light, therefore we ought to act in the light of what is revealed about these events.

It seems to me this forces us to ask ourselves some questions. I would like to suggest a few which I think we ought to take very seriously in view of the trends of our day, and in the light of our turbulent times and the power of these prophetic Scriptures.

Surely it is fair to ask ourselves, Should we seek to continue constantly raising our standard of living in the light of these coming events? Is it really fair, in the face of a world which is soon to be knowing widespread famine and starvation, to continue to add to our standard of living?

I am not trying to be negative. I am not one of those who believe that poverty is necessarily a mark of righteousness. But surely that is a fair question to ask in the face of the pressing needs of the world around us.

Is it right for us to try to own a third car, a cabin in the mountains, an expensive boat, or other luxuries? I hasten to add that no one has any authority whatsoever to sit in judgment over another in these matters. These are issues which must be settled for each individual only before God. But I do think we ought to settle them in the light of a conscience that, as the Apostle Paul said, seeks to be void of all offense before men. Is it right that we should spend the additional money that is available to most of us today solely on ourselves while the cause of God is languishing in so many ways for lack of funds? Should we not deliberately and voluntarily forego certain leisure and recreation, recognizing that it is perfectly proper to have normal recreation and leisure, but to use some of the time thus available for just being friends to each other, and showing love and concern for one another?

Recently at a church board meeting we were discussing the perennial problem that some of the visitors here regard this as a cold church, where you could come for years and learn a lot of truth, but you won't make many friends. Something is wrong if that is the case. We are not properly demonstrating the warmth of Christian love, which must be preeminent above everything else if we belong to Jesus Christ. I know how easily it happens: we are all engulfed in our own programs and schedules. Well, then, let's forget some of the schedules! We need to take more time for friendship and not rush away to things. Let us get to know one another, and be more aggressive in breaking through the natural barriers that keep us from meeting people we haven't met before. Let us manifest the love, concern, and friendship that many of us desire to express toward one another but for one reason or another have not done so.

These are fair questions, are they not?

"What manner of persons ought we to be," in the light of these events?

We know where we are heading. We see beyond the darkness to the glory of the light that shall dawn. We do not need to be depressed; we do not need to be discouraged; we do not need to be downcast or pessimistic. Nor, on the other hand, should we give way to glowing but unfounded optimism, which so many try to display without reason. Let us rather be realistic. Let us obey the Lord and lift up our heads and rejoice, for God is working out his program. But surely it ought to lay some demand upon us to live, not for ourselves, but for the advance of God's cause in these days.

Is that unreasonable? Is it not what these events should devolve upon us? Should we not re-evaluate our lives and our daily activities in the light of these portentous events which are soon to come upon the earth? I leave it to you and your conscience before God.

Prayer:

Our Father, for many years some of us have been reading these prophetic Scriptures and treating them as designed merely to satisfy our curiosity. We confess that we have never really taken them seriously until we see world events shaping themselves into this very mold. Lord, help us to take these things seriously and act in the light of these events, not giving way to the current foibles and fashions that men and women of the world around us, who live in ignorance of these things, reflect. But make us, Lord, to walk in the light that streams from your word, and to be men and women of love, grace, concern, warmth, truth, and honesty in

these days. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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