

A MUCH NEEDED WORD OF ASSURANCE

7 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions [passed through] his mind [as he lay] upon his bed. He wrote down the dream and related the summary of it. ²Daniel said, In my vision that came to me at night I was observing and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. ³And four great beasts came up out of the sea, each one different from the others. ⁴The first was like a lion, but it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were plucked and it was lifted off of the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. ⁵And there before me was another beast, a second one that was like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. They said to it, Get up and devour a great amount of flesh! ⁶After this I looked, and there before me was another [beast, this one was] like a leopard. On its back it had four wings like those of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. ⁷After this, in the vision [I received] at night I looked and there before me was a fourth beast—dreadful and terrifying and extremely powerful. It had large iron teeth; it devoured [its victims] and broke them into pieces and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the beasts that came before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸While I was considering the horns, there before me another horn, a little one, came up among them. Three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great things.

⁹I continued to look until thrones were set in place, and the one who was the Ancient of Days took his seat. His garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames and its wheels were a burning fire. ¹⁰A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated and the books were opened. ¹¹At that time I watched because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. I watched until the beast was killed and its body was destroyed and burned with fire. ¹²(The other beasts had been deprived of their authority, but their lives had been prolonged for a period of time.) ¹³In the vision [I received] at night I looked and there before me came one who was like a son of man on the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and he was brought into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority and glory and a kingdom, so that all the peoples, nations, and [men of every] language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed.

¹⁵I, Daniel, found my spirit distressed within me, and the visions [that passed through] my mind troubled me. ¹⁶I approached one of those who was standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things. ¹⁷These great beasts, which are four [in number], are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. ¹⁸But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, indeed, forever and ever. ¹⁹Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, the one that was different from all the others, extremely terrifying with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze—[the beast] that devoured [its victims] and broke them into pieces and then trampled underfoot whatever remained.

²⁰[I] also [wanted to know] about the ten horns that were on its head, and about the other horn that came up, before which three [of the horns] fell—the horn that had eyes and a mouth that uttered great things, and that looked more imposing than the others. ²¹As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and was defeating them; ²²until the Ancient of Days came and a verdict was pronounced in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. ²³He gave me this explanation: The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on earth, one that will be different from all the [other] kingdoms; it shall devour the whole earth and trample it down and break it to pieces. ²⁴The ten horns represent ten kings who will come from this kingdom. Then another [king] shall come after them; he will be different from the previous ones, and he will subdue three kings. ²⁵He will utter words against the Most High and will wear out the saints of the Most High. He will try to change the [set] times and the [natural] laws; and [the saints] will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time. ²⁶But the court will sit in judgment, and they shall take away his dominion, consuming and destroying it totally. ²⁷Then the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of [all] the kingdoms under the whole heaven, will be given to the people who are the saints of the Most High—his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominions will serve and obey him. ²⁸At this point the revelation ended. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale. But I kept the matter to myself. (Dan. 7:1-28)

Introduction

Vera was a young woman who was expelled from her university because of her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. She also recalls how, when she was ten years old, her father was taken away to a prison camp because he had such a strong Christian witness in their community. (*POWER*, 6/3/84)

Yuri knelt beside his bed and prayed. He prayed for Christian fellowship and the opportunity to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Night after night Yuri made that prayer beside his bed in the remote Siberian labor camp to which he had been sentenced because of his Christian activities. (*POWER*, 3/6/84)

Hin Go Lam was sentenced to prison and hard labor in the dark mines because of his Christian activity. When he was released to return to his hometown he made the agonizing discovery that his wife, his mother, and his father had all died during that fifteen-year interval without his ever having been notified (*POWER*, 4/22/90).

The report comes from one country that "Christians face constant threats of fines and imprisonment" (*POWER*, 6/11/89, p.3). From another country comes the report that Christians are treated as second-class citizens and delegated the poorest housing and jobs. Many are imprisoned because of their stand for Christ. (*POWER*, 6/3/84, p.2)

The individuals and groups cited here have two things in common. First, they are numbered among the saints of God; that is to say, they are disciples of the Lord Jesus

Christ. Second, they found themselves living under a government that actively displays its hostility to God, to much the same degree as the government described in Daniel chapter seven.

As a Christian, you can expect to encounter the enmity of the world, especially when a government becomes as overtly hostile to God as the one described in Daniel seven. But that passage of Daniel also contains a divine word of assurance: *“the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, indeed, forever and ever”* (Dan. 7:18.)

I. Be Assured that We will Receive the Kingdom of God, Even though We Must Pass through Tribulation (Dan. 7:1-8,19-28)

What is especially striking and significant in the seventh chapter of Daniel is the fact that the people of God are six times designated as *“saints.”*

A T.V. news show featured a segment on the process the Roman Catholic Church employs when it wishes to bestow “sainthood” upon a noteworthy Christian. According to that documentary, the candidate for sainthood must have exhibited an eminently holy life; furthermore, the candidate had to have performed at least two miracles. The whole concept underlying the canonization of saints in the Roman Catholic Church is the idea that there is a distinction between super Christians (who can become saints) and average Christians (who can derive benefit from the super Christians.) In this scheme of things the super Christians are actively devoted to Christ, and the average Christians may passively receive the benefits of their “superabundance of merit.”

But in striking contrast to this concept of sainthood for the super Christian, the Bible defines every true believer in Christ as a saint who has the obligation of a saint, namely, a life of full time devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. The Apostle Paul, addressing the whole congregation of the church in Corinth, writes: *“to the church of God that is in Corinth—to those who are sanctified (ἀγιάζω) in Christ Jesus and called to be saints (αγιος) (1 Cor. 1:2.)* By virtue of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings you into a living union with Him, you have been *“sanctified;”* that is to say, you have been set apart for God to be His own possession, and you have been made like God in His holiness (you have come to possess Christ’s own merit and nature.) The biblical principle that is operative here is the fact that what was once morally and spiritually unclean has now been made holy by coming into living union with Christ, the Holy One of God. Now, as a Christian, we are called by God to live out in everyday life the new identity of holiness, which we have entered into by virtue of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a Christian, you have become a saint of God in Christ Jesus; and as a saint of God you can expect to encounter the hostility of the world. The Lord Jesus declared to His first disciples, and to all subsequent believers:

*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. ²¹But they will do all these things to you for my name's sake, because they do not know [i.e., they do not have love for nor affiliation with] *the one who sent me.* (Jn. 15:18-21)*

The point being made in Daniel chapter seven is this: the saints of God especially experience the enmity of the world when they are living under a government that overtly expresses its hostility to God, and such conditions will especially prevail in the closing period of history. Daniel receives a vision in which he sees four beasts coming up out of the sea, each one representing a future empire from the perspective of Daniel's time in history (vs. 17.)

Daniel's attention is especially captured by the fourth beast. This beast is in a class by itself; its terror and power cannot be compared to even the most ferocious beast in the animal kingdom:

... there before me was a fourth beast—dreadful and terrifying and extremely powerful. It had large iron teeth; it devoured [its victims] and broke them into pieces and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the beasts that came before it, and it had ten horns. (vs. 7)

This hideous creature not only has ten horns, but Daniel observes the appearance of yet another horn, one that arises to speak great things (vs. 8) and to wage war against the saints of God (vs. 21.)

It is explained to Daniel that this fourth beast is actually a composite picture: the various parts that compose the picture actually represent different kingdoms and rulers that shall appear in successive periods of history (vs. 23-27.) The fourth beast itself represents a fourth empire that shall come to power after the rise and fall of the first three empires (represented by the first three beasts)—this was the Roman Empire, which was truly universal in its scope and ambition (vs. 23.) The ten horns represent future empires that shall appear in history after the Roman Empire, but will be similar to that empire in their influence and ambition (vs. 24a)—the number ten, a complete number in Scripture, is probably intended to refer to all the subsequent empires of history who follow in the spirit of the Roman Empire and thus can be said to arise out of that kingdom.

The little horn represents a final and distinct empire and ruler, the final anti-Christ (vs. 24b-26.) *"He will subdue three kings"*—he will eliminate whatever opposition he may encounter; but for the most part, he will find receptivity and acquiescence to his rule, as seen by there being only three kings whom he finds necessary to defeat. *"He will utter words against the Most High"* (or, *"he will speak*

words along side the Most High")—he shall consider himself to be God's equal as well as God's enemy; note 2 Thessalonians 2:4, a passage also referring to the anti-Christ: *"He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, presenting himself in the place of God"* (2 Thess. 2:4.) *"He will wear out the saints of the Most High"*—he will pursue a relentless and "successful" persecution of the Christian church, composed of the Jewish community that believed in Jesus the Messiah, along with all those Gentiles who have come to faith in Jesus. *"He will try to change the set times and natural laws"*—he will seek to re-structure the natural order of creation and the law of God. Note: As a 20th century precursor of the final anti-Christ, consider how the Communist leader, Joseph Stalin, sought to do this very kind of thing:

... it was the fiftieth birthday celebrations at the end of 1929 that marked the real beginning, not only of Stalin's unfettered personal rule, but of the Stalin cult in all its nightmare maturity ... with the first appearance of the Stalinist litanies—Man of Steel, the Granite Bolshevik, the Brass-hard Leninist, the Iron Soldier, the Universal Genius—there appeared a form of ruler-worship that went back to the Egyptian pharaohs. While Soviet government became more ... liturgical in its externals, and more terroristic in essentials, Soviet science moved into the irrational, with quasi-religious groups of leading thinkers ... struggling to win Stalin's approval for their all-embracing theories of physical progress. Some of the experts at Stalin's court were ready to argue that, with the "Man of Steel" in charge, human will could overcome anything, and what had hitherto been regarded as the laws of nature or of economics could be suspended. As one of his economists ... put it: "Our task is not to study economics but to change it. We are bound by no laws." (*Modern Times*, Paul Johnson, Harper and Row, New York, 1983, p.267)

The angel informs Daniel that this figure, whom we identify as the anti-Christ, will rule for *"a time, times, and half a time."* That is to say, he shall establish his rule, he will expand his dominion, but he will suddenly be broken and destroyed, note verse 26, *"the court will sit in judgment, and they shall take away his dominion, consuming and destroying it totally."*

Such is the vision presented to Daniel, a vision that graphically depicts the hostility of the world against the saints of God. But so that we do not become overwhelmed by the prospect of what lies in store for the saints of God upon this earth, we must not lose sight of the end of the story as related in verses 26-27,

But the court will sit in judgment, and they shall take away his [i.e., the anti-Christ's] dominion, consuming and destroying it totally. ²⁷Then the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of [all] the kingdoms under the whole heaven, will be given to the people who are the saints of the Most High—his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominions will serve and obey him. (Dan. 7:26-27)

As Christians, we may be assured that we shall receive the kingdom of God, even though we must pass through tribulation. As Paul and Barnabas instructed the early churches, *"through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22.)

II. Be Assured that We will Receive the Kingdom of God, Because the LORD will Act on Our Behalf (Dan. 7:21-22,9-14,25-27)

In verse 21 we read this disconcerting report: *"As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and was defeating them."* But in verse 22 we are told the rest of the story; the anti-Christ will achieve "success" over the church of Christ only *"until the Ancient of Days came and a verdict was pronounced in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."*

Verses 9-14 are describing in greater detail the event of the Final Judgment, (which is repeated in summary form in verse 22):

I continued to look until thrones were set in place, and the one who was the Ancient of Days took his seat. His garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames and its wheels were a burning fire. ¹⁰A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated and the books were opened. ¹¹At that time I watched because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. I watched until the beast was killed and its body was destroyed and burned with fire. ¹²(The other beasts had been deprived of their authority, but their lives had been prolonged for a period of time.) ¹³In the vision [I received] at night I looked and there before me came one who was like a son of man on the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and he was brought into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority and glory and a kingdom, so that all the peoples, nations, and [men of every] language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:9-14)

Note: Verse 12 is contrasting the previous fate of the other empires with that of the final empire. The previous empires were each toppled from power and supplanted by the next one, but their life and ambition were carried on in the succeeding empires, so they were not totally annihilated from the earth. This is in contrast to the fate of the final empire; it is completely destroyed and replaced by the coming of the eternal kingdom of God. Then shall be fulfilled the prophecy of Revelation 11:15, *"The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, that said: The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever."*

Verses 26-27 once more repeat the prophecy of the Final Judgment with the emphasis on the certainty that the LORD God shall act for His glory and for His saints:

... the court will sit in judgment, and they shall take away his dominion, consuming and destroying it totally. ²⁷Then the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of [all] the kingdoms under the whole heaven, will be given to the people who are the saints of the Most High—his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominions will serve and obey him. (Dan. 7:26-27)

Be assured that we will receive the kingdom of God, because the LORD will act on our behalf and for His glory:

God is just; He will pay back affliction to those who afflict you ⁷and give relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸He will punish those who do not know [i.e., they do not have love for nor affiliation with] God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰on the day he comes to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thess. 1:6-10)

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Lk. 12:32)