

God's Way Out

"For Us and For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."
Ezra 8:21.

Lesson 14. More about God's Way for Nations

Perhaps you have sometimes wished you could have a guide to the mysterious movements of the nations in these times. If so, read in this chapter and the next, the lines of the program which God holds in His hand. The last item is a glorious climax just what your heart has longed for.

MORE remarkable than Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and even more startling than the prophecy which aroused Cyrus, were the visions given by God to Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's Prime Minister. So remarkable were they that Christ Jesus the Lord commended these words to His disciples' study. [1]

For God revealed to Daniel not a fourteen-year plan, not a four-hundred-year plan, but one which covered a space of twelve hundred and sixty years and another, which spanned two thousand three hundred years. He told the story of nations before ever they were born. He unfolded the future right down to the new Eden kingdom.

Daniel had often thought of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image--the "Primer of Prophecy." He remembered its four great world empires, and especially, perhaps, the fourth, which divided up into weak and strong kingdoms. He himself was to see Babylon, the first kingdom, overturned by Medo-Persia, the second. The winds of war were even now raging among the peoples, nations, and languages of the ancient world. His own visions repeated the outlines given to Nebuchadnezzar, but filled in strange new details.

The Night Vision of the Strange Beasts

In Daniel's vision he stood by the seashore in a bewildering storm. The east wind raged, the north wind lifted the waves, a roaring gale from the south sent the spray flying; then the billows heaved and sank with the violence of a storm from the west. It seemed as though all the world was in tumult.

Then to Daniel's astonishment, four wild beasts came splashing out of the sea. Strange, weird creatures they were, born of the tumult and war of the winds.

The first was like a lion, but it had wings like a great eagle! Then, behold! Some unseen power plucked the wings out, and made the king of beasts stand on its hind legs like a spiritless circus lion. The second beast was like a bear. It came shuffling out of the water, its claws rattling on the sand and shingle, a brute of stubborn strength. Between its teeth it was cracking three gory ribs, remnants of a recent feast.

Daniel marked the bear's movements and noted that it heaved itself up ponderously on one side. And suddenly a voice called out to the shaggy creature: "Arise, devour much flesh!" Following the bear out of the waves was a leopard. But what a leopard! Four tossing heads rose from its shoulders, and four great wings from its black and yellow back. "Speedy beast this!" Daniel must have thought, as he noted with surprise the eagle pinions. "What beautiful, double-spotted markings! What a lithe, low-built creature! The sea-water is still dripping from its white fur underneath."

Some beast is following the leopard out. "What monster is this?" he questioned in dread. Never had he seen such an animal as the huge, fearsome creature which splashed out behind the leopard. It lumbered up the beach, a beast with titan muscles and ugly face. See its iron teeth grinding up that piece of flesh! See its brazen nails are tearing up the carcass of some unfortunate creatures swept up by the tide. Now it is actually stamping into pulp what it left.

What Changes Foreshadowed!

Daniel looked up at the ferocious head. It was surmounted by ten vicious-looking horns. As he gazed he saw another little horn forcing its way out and uprooting before it three of the other horns. And, strange sight! There were shrewd, cruel eyes in this horn and a moving mouth speaking great things. See the horn makes war with God's children and seems to have the mastery over them! Suddenly another scene appeared to the prophet. Gleaming thrones were placed in position, and God Himself, the Ancient of Days, solemnly took His place in the principal seat, which now glowed like a fiery flame.

Then thousands and thousands of radiant angels thronged in. The judgment was set, and the books were opened. A flaming, fiery stream now flows from the dazzling light of the throne of God. "The hour of God's judgment is come!" gasped Daniel to himself. "Oh, the hour of His judgment is come. Father in heaven, may our sins be all forgiven." And probably he thought of the annual day of judgment at home in Judea, when the high priest solemnly cleansed the sanctuary, and the names of those who had left the faith were blotted from the records. [2]

Incongruously enough, the little horn began speaking again. Speaking great ill-timed words against the Most High. See, now the angels are in action against the beast! His body is destroyed and given to the burning flame. The scene shifts back to the shining company of angels before the throne. Cherubim and seraphim, angel princes and leaders, ministering spirits in rank after rank, arrayed in dazzling light, bow before that Form of insufferable glory on the throne of fire.

“Alas! Alas! What place is this for a sinful human being an ordinary man like me?” thought the shrinking prophet. But just then his heart brightened with hope. Among that shining company of angelic beings came a Man with the clouds of heaven.

Who Was That Man in Heaven?

“Ah! A Man!” rejoiced Daniel. “A Man, like me! I am no longer alone. I have company of my own kind in the judgment.” But lo! This glorious Son of man, also Son of God, was brought near to the Ancient of Days, who gave to Him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him. “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,” Daniel was assured.

So the vision ended. Like Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, it closed with the God of heaven setting up His everlasting kingdom of joy and peace. Glad hope for Daniel and for us, the Son of man would then be the King for ever and ever and Eden would be restored again.

What Does It All Mean?

Daniel in his dream asked one who stood by to tell him the meaning of all this. “These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise,” explained the interpreter. “But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.” What a joyful prospect!

Daniel, without doubt, promptly recognized the similarity of this explanation with that of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the image with its four metals symbolizing the four great world kingdoms. Possibly he ruminated: “Babylon was the head of gold in the king’s dream. Babylon, here in this vision, must be symbolized by this lion-beast. Is Babylon near its end now? Will Medo-Persia triumph? Is Medo-Persia the bear?”

“Yes, prophet!” we of this century reply: “As the lion was followed by the bear, so Babylon was followed by Medo-Persia.” Then, as the bear was followed by a

leopard, so Medo-Persia was to be succeeded by a kingdom remarkable for beauty and for the amazing swiftness of its conquests.

How exactly this came to pass! The signposts of history came in sight with the passage of time, just as the vision suggested. The blundering forces of Medo-Persia were defeated by the incredibly swift-moving leopard-like armies of Alexander the Great, head of the Greeks--the nation of handsome athletes and beautiful women. Just as shown in Daniel's dream. [3] Then when Alexander died, his kingdom was divided under four heads--just as the divine symbols had indicated.

The Fourth Beast Arouses Daniel's Alarm

"But the fourth beast?" "I would know the truth of that dreadful fourth beast," said Daniel to the one who stood nearby. "What is that?"

"The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth," says the heavenly interpreter.

"Ah! like the fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's image, the legs of iron," thinks Daniel.

But was Greece conquered by a stronger power?

"Yes," says the voice of history. "At the battle of Pydna the Roman army under Emilius Paulus defeated Perseus and crushed the Macedonian power. The last great power in the east was here broken. The Roman Senate was henceforth recognized by the whole civilized world as the source and fountain of supreme political wisdom and power." [4]

A stronger power? It certainly was. "The fourth kingdom shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces," said Daniel's informant. "It is Rome, Rome!" calls out the accusing voice of history. "Rome conquered almost all the known world!"

"Rome, Rome!" echo the voices of thousands of valiant Gauls, hewn to the ground by the Roman legions. "Rome, Rome!" voices of thousands of ancient Britons reply. "Rome, who trod us down, sold us as slaves, and broke in pieces our brave Boadicea's army."

"Rome, Rome!" the accusing voices of thousands of Jews reply. "Rome, who conquered and crushed us. Rome, who burned our beautiful Jerusalem and carried ninety-seven thousand of us away as captives to the slave-market." [5]

"Woe is me!" Comes a cry from ruined Corinth. "Rome burned all my buildings to the ground."

"Alas, that so much cruelty and perfidy could exist!" says the dust of Carthage. "Rome deceived me and burned me to ashes!"

"Rome broke down my walls and wore out my people," laments an accusing voice from Spain's once prosperous city of Numantia.

"Yes, Rome, Rome!" comes a multitude of voices from Christian martyrs. "Rome threw us to the lions in the arena. Rome burned us like flaming torches. Rome, Rome!" Yes, Rome was the fourth beast, dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly.

But Rome Was Broken Up in Her Turn

"The ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall, arise," continues the interpreter.

"Ah, Rome! Then thou, too, shall be broken and divided," hosts of revengeful voices call from the kingdoms which she had cast down. "Into ten kingdoms shall thou be broken."

"Come, you tribes of Franks, you Visigoths, you Ostrogoths, you Angles and Saxons!

"Come, you Vandals, you Lombards, you Burgundians.

"Hasten, you Suevi, you Heruli, you Alemanni. Smash into fragments this kingdom of Rome, who crushed the nations to the ground."

They came. They came, as God had foreseen and depicted. Barbarian tribes forded the Rhine, crossed the Alps, descended upon the luxury-weakened peoples of the Roman Empire, and broke down its ancient power. To Roman Britain came the Anglo-Saxons in their ships. To France came the Franks. Eight other tribes surged westward and wrested the scepter out of Rome's palsied hands. As we look back at the year AD 476, we hear the voice of history proclaiming:

"It is done! This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. Rome, whom men expected should live forever, is divided among the ten kingdoms of Western Europe." Yes, the ten kingdoms were now possessors of the land from the borders of Scotland to the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and from the Rhine to the rough Atlantic. How long shall they remain at peace? Not for long.

“Another king shall rise after them,” continues the prophecy. “He shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.”

What Is the Little Horn--the New Persecuting Kingdom?

“Another” king-another power - “diverse from the first,” said the interpreter. Yes, there was a different power coming into view right at that time. Strange to say, it was in the Christian church itself. For almost three centuries after the Lord Jesus had died, the Christian church had progressed amid the fires of persecution. Sometimes it was tolerated; often it was fiercely persecuted. But then Constantine had battled his way to the Roman throne. He claimed he had accepted the Christian faith, and the long despised sect had come into royal favor. In AD 313 the heralds proclaimed Christianity the state religion of the Empire.

But the Emperor's favor had brought spiritual declension. The warm love and simplicity of the Christians had cooled off. Religious wars broke out. Swords were drawn, and fierce battles raged even about theological terms. The Bishop of Rome struggled with rival Christian leaders to secure the highest place of authority in the church.

Times and Laws Changed

Standards were lowered in order to attract numbers. Sabbath keeping was disparaged and then prohibited. Sunday-keeping was easier for those who had been sun-worshippers. The second commandment was set aside and image-worship began again. Thus did this strange power “think to change times and laws.” Official Christianity became a strange blend of church and state--of psalms and swords. The heavenly power became an earthly power--yet still with the form of the heavenly.

Just as in our time the Roman Catholic Church contends relentlessly for the supremacy of Rome, so it was in those days. The Bishop of Rome had espoused the Athanasian creed. Three of the ten invading nations professed the Arian creed and stood in his way. They must be uprooted. And uprooted they were, by sword and spear and flame. In AD 493 the Heruli were plucked up. In AD 534 the sea-faring Vandals were defeated. In AD 538 the Ostrogoths went down, conquered. So the apostate Christian church, headed by the bishop or pope of Rome, gradually came into power. He loved, like Diotrefes, to have the pre-eminence.

What Great Words!

But if the pope or Papacy is the little horn, did he speak words against the Most High? He surely did! Look at a few of the pope's self-accepted titles: "Vicegerent of the Son of God," "Our Lord God, the Pope," "Another God upon earth," "King of the world. King of kings and Lord of lords." Said Pope Nicholas to Emperor Michael, "The Pope, who is called God by Constantine, can never be bound or released by man; for God cannot be judged by man." [6]

Did the Papacy Persecute?

"But did the Roman Catholic Church really wear out the saints of the Most High?" one asks. Let us command in imagination, a resurrection of witnesses, and hear their testimony. If we could raise the dead, what voices we should hear! Listen to the King of France with his nobles and bishops:-

"Pope Innocent III commanded us to wreak vengeance on the province of Languedoc, which would not acknowledge his authority. So we captured the city of Beziers and massacred fifty thousand people. "When we took the town of Lavaur, that seat of heresy, we allowed a general massacre, and cut to pieces men, women, and children until there was nothing left to kill, except four hundred of the garrison. Them we burned in a single pile." [7]

Other voices are speaking-voices of other martyrs: "Woe to St. Dominic and his black-cloaked friars with their Inquisition! Through them every land has seen the spectacle of blazing heretics and tortured saints. Woe to the Roman clergy who saw these things with delight!" Let the citizens of Northern Spain testify: "Yes, yes! It was our Ignatius Loyola who founded the Order of the Jesuits. They brought torture and trembling dread to almost every country where their feet trod!"

The Waldenses of the Italian Alps call out: "The Papacy wore us out with cruel persecution. Century after century they hounded us down. Us, mountaineers of the primitive apostolic faith!" Urgently the Huguenots of France give witness: "Rome oppressed us, robbed us, tortured and massacred us. Remember the awful night of St. Bartholomew when Paris ran with innocent blood shed by the Papacy." Yes, truly this "horn" wore out the saints of the Most High.

Bible Arithmetic--How Long Would This Power Continue?

"They shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time," said the angel interpreter. But what does that mean? This is a curious time prediction hidden by symbols from the casual glance of enemies who might

endeavor to throw discredit on it. For 1260 years the Papacy was given power. But these days were shortened and the Bible was illuminated again.

Yet the meaning is fairly simple. These "times" are years. This is shown by the angel's word, in the fourth chapter of Daniel, where Nebuchadnezzar was to eat grass like a beast until seven "times." should pass over him. Josephus calls these seven years. [8]

But "a year, years, and the dividing of a year," How many years? And what is a "dividing of a year"? Well, "years" must be at least two years. And if we divide a year into two we have two halves. So, one year, plus two years, plus half a year; that equals three and a half years. Can this be the answer? Yes! When John the revelator is speaking of this very same period he calls it "1260 days." [9] This is exactly the number of days in three and a half Jewish years of 360 days to the year (they had twelve months of thirty days each).

One thousand two hundred and sixty days. This now seems quite clear. The people of God were to be oppressed by the Roman persecuting power for 1260 days. But just as these four short-lived beasts were symbols of long-lived nations, so the "days" of symbolic prophecy represent long years. This is clearly shown in the symbols of Ezekiel's prophecy. [10] The "days" in which he was to act the long "siege" were symbols of "years." "I have given thee each day for a year," said God. Now if the 1260 years began when the last of the three kingdoms was plucked up before the Papacy in AD 538, then obviously they closed in AD 1798! For, adding 1260 to 538 we get 1798. Did this come to pass?

Yes, wars fell heavily on the Roman Catholic Church as the year 1798 approached. In that very year the pope was taken prisoner by Berthier, the French general, and the Papacy was for the time abolished. His power over "the saints" was gone. God's way out was to use an atheistic general to give the final blow delivering His people from the power of the Papacy.

How accurately the long-drawn-out prophecy was fulfilled! God knows the way of the nations, and He knows the way for us right through these days to the glad time when the saints shall possess the kingdom for ever and ever.

REFERENCES:

1. Matthew 24:15.
2. Leviticus 23: 27, 29.
3. Daniel 8:20,21.
4. Myers' General History, Page 269.

5. Josephus' Wars of the Jews, Page 434 (Every man Edition)
6. Daniel and the Revelation, Page 136.
7. Historical Studies, by Eugene Lawrence, Page 51.
8. Josephus' "Antiquities," Book 10, Chapter 6.
9. Revelation 12:6.
10. Ezekiel 4:4, 6.

