

Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 4



Curtain to the Future

- **Two college kids, John and Ron, faced a big assignment deep in the jungle of New Guinea. They were supposed to get local villagers to help them build a mission airstrip.**
- **But because of a mix-up they'd been dropped off at the location without a translator. Suddenly they were very much alone, facing a group of primitive people, some of whom still practiced cannibalism.**
- **They couldn't communicate. They didn't know where they would stay or what they would eat. There was supposed to be a Christian villager in the area, but Ron and John had no idea how to contact him.**
- **So they prayed that God would protect them and help them. Soon they spotted a tall, white man walking out of the jungle straight toward them. He was accompanied by an Indonesian. The white man and his colleague were working for a Bible translation ministry.**

Curtain to the Future

- **Before Ron and John knew it, these two men had arranged a place for them to stay near the site of the airfield and provided food for them to eat. They helped Ron and John write down all the phrases they would need to direct the locals in building the airfield. After spending hours on this make-shift dictionary, the two men said, “See you later!” And they walked back into the jungle.**
- **As Ron and John watched them disappear, the mystery of this providential rendezvous began to sink in. The two men had no backpacks, no supplies. It would take them several days of trekking through the jungle to get to any town. Ron and John had no idea where they’d come from or where they were going. It seemed like these two men had just been dropped from heaven, exactly when they were needed. Ron and John were able to build that mission airstrip, using the phrases they’d been given. And all that time, they had the sense that angels were at their shoulders.**

Curtain to the Future

- **God can act on our behalf in a supernatural way. He cares about you and me and longs to use His power for our good. Satan is always trying to interfere with God's blessings. And sometimes we wonder why he is allowed to do so.**
- **But in the end God is going to win big time, and Satan is going to lose big time.**
- **In Daniel 7, God gives us a glimpse of future events that lead toward the divine climax of history.**
- **A loving heavenly Father wants to assure us about where we're ultimately headed.**

1. Curtain to the Future

- **Yes, sometimes it's hard to see God's guiding hand. It's hard when your child dies of leukemia; it's hard when a spouse refuses to acknowledge the problems in your marriage; it's hard when some disturbed individual mows down school kids with an assault rifle.**
- **But God is much more pained by these tragedies than we are. He is even more deeply wounded by the suffering that sin causes in our world than you or I could ever be.**
- **And God is working out His plan to bring a permanent solution to the horror of sin—so that it will never happen again.**
- **Let's see what information God has given to us in Daniel chapter 7 to help us understand how the pieces of life's puzzle fit together.**

2. The Promises in God's Prophecies

- **At the end of Daniel 5, Belshazzar had been defeated by Darius the Mede. Daniel 7 flashes back to earlier incidents in this king's life. It takes us back to the first year of his reign, around 553 B.C. At that time Nebuchadnezzar had been dead about nine years. Daniel was an elderly man in his seventies. He'd interpreted that dream of the statue made of various metals some fifty years before!**
- **That prophetic dream of one empire swallowing up another might seem a bit cold and hard at first glance. Many people were slaughtered in that process of conquest.**
- **But remember that God was giving people a glimpse of the future in order to prepare them for where the world was heading. He wasn't the cause of all those conflicts. He was simply working to make them come out to something good in the end. He was being honest with people about what would happen in this world.**

2. The Promises in God's Prophecies

- **That's how God is. That's the kind of relationship He wants to have with each of us.**
- **Genuine intimacy happens only when a relationship is open and honest. God shoots straight with us, and He wants us to shoot straight with Him.**
- **But He is also shooting from the heart. Even in the darkest prophecy, God manages to sprinkle gentle reminders of His love for us and of His desire to remove forever sin and suffering from our lives.**
- **Let's look at a few of these reminders:**

2. The Promises in God's Prophecies

- **A “His [Jesus’] dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).**
- **“The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (vs. 18).**
- **“They shall take away his [Satan’s] dominion,” and “the kingdom and dominion . . . shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High” (vss. 26, 27).**
- **God’s promises add up to one forceful point: He is going to win. His people are going to win. Satan and sin are going to lose; they’re going to disappear. It may be rough at times while this ultimate plan unfolds, but the ending is worth the wait!**

3. Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts

- **Imagine Daniel curled up in bed, head on a pillow, the covers pulled up to his chin. He has gone to bed thinking this night would be just like any other. But into his sleep comes an extraordinary dream, one he would never forget. Daniel is on a beach.**
- **A strong wind has made the ocean restless. Waves batter the shoreline. They explode into spray as they crash against the rocks.**
- **In the middle of this fury, what should appear but the head of a lion, emerging from the murky depths and moving through violent waves toward the shore.**
- **Soon Daniel sees the body of the lion striding above the surf. As if that weren't enough, three more remarkable animals appear out of the sea in succession. What could such a dream mean? Daniel soon finds out.**
- **The mystery of the beasts is solved in Daniel 7:17: "Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth." Verses 18–22 tell us that after these four kingdoms had ruled the world, God's heavenly kingdom would be established.**

Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts

- **Does this sound familiar? Remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, about that statue made of four metals? God is now saying the same thing in a different way.**
- **He wants to give us more information about these kingdoms and the flow of history. He wants to "fill in the blanks." Let's find out what new information God is revealing as Daniel describes his dream:**
- **"Four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings.**
- **I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it" (Daniel 7:4).**

Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts

- **The first animal Daniel saw coming out of the sea was a lion. But this lion was different from those you see in the zoo. He had the wings of an eagle. This represents speedy conquest. But this lion loses its wings and becomes like a man. The fierce and fearless king of beasts becomes vulnerable.**
- **This represents the loss of power, the loss of conquests. And that's what happened to Babylon. It lost its empire to Medo-Persia. Interestingly, archaeologists have discovered that ancient Babylon (605-539 B.C.) was often represented as a winged lion on coins and on sculpted walls.**
- **A bear is the second animal which lumbers out of the sea. "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!' " (vs. 5).**

Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts

- **The bear represents the kingdom of Medo-Persia (539-331 B.C.). The hump on one side symbolizes the fact that the Persians were more powerful than the Medes. The three ribs represent the countries of Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt which Medo-Persia conquered as it built its great empire.**
- **The next animal to rise out of the murky sea with seaweed and brine dripping from its body is a leopard “which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it” (vs. 6).**
- **The leopard represents Alexander the Great’s kingdom of Greece (331-168 B.C.) which supplanted the Medo-Persians. This was a leopard that appears to have had its DNA altered because it sports four heads and four wings! The wings symbolize the great speed with which Alexander conquered much of the known world. After Alexander’s death, his empire was split into four kingdoms symbolized by the four heads of the leopard.**

Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts

- **“After this,” Daniel continues, “I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, 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 beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns” (vs. 7).**
- **What great power followed Greece in 168 B.C.? Rome. Rome ruled the world with an iron hand. But Rome would eventually fall, just like the other empires.**
- **In Daniel chapter 2, this breakup of the Roman Empire was pictured by the feet of the statue, fragmented into clay and iron. But in this chapter, the breakup is represented by a group of horns. These ten horns (like the statue’s ten toes) symbolize the European nations that emerged after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Rome didn’t fall to another world power. It was overrun by barbaric tribes from the north as it decayed from within.**

Daniel's Vision of Four Beasts

- **Thought Questions: The four kingdoms represented by the beasts in Daniel 7 are different kingdoms than those represented by the metals in the statue of Daniel 2. (False or True)**
- **In Daniel 7, the prophet is given a vision of four animals, or beasts, coming up out of the sea. These beasts represent four world kingdoms. (True or False)**

A Little Horn

- **But we also see another detail in Daniel 7—a new piece of the prophetic picture that wasn't there before.**
- **Verse 8 tells us that a little horn comes up among the ten horns.**
- **As it rises, this little horn rips three of the other ten horns out of the head of the beast. History demonstrates that the three fallen horns represent three tribes—the Heruli, Ostrogoths, and Vandals—which were defeated by a power which rose out of Rome.**
- **Daniel describes this power, this little horn, as having the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking pompous words (vs. 25).**
- **Daniel was extremely curious about the identity of this “little horn.” In verse 19 he states that he wanted to know the truth about the fourth beast and the little horn.**

A Little Horn: summary of the characteristics of the little horn.

- Displayed human eyes (vs. 8).**
- Had a mouth speaking pompous words (vs. 8).**
- Removed three of the ten horns, or kings (vs. 8).**
- Appeared more imposing than the other horns (vs. 20).**
- Made war against God's people and prevailed for a period of time (vs. 21).**
- Persecuted God's people (vs. 25).**
- Attempted to change times and laws (vs. 25).**
- Prevailed against God's people for a time, times, and a half time (vs. 25).**
- Its dominion and power will be removed (vs. 26).**
- Its kingdom and dominion eventually given to God's people (vss. 26, 27).**

A Little Horn

- **The fact that the “little horn” was basically a horn like all the others suggests that it was a political power. But its unique characteristics suggest that it was more than just a political entity. This power has a great deal to do with religion. It attempts to change God’s law and persecutes His people. People change governmental laws all the time. But this power is doing something more. The fact that this “little horn” attacks God’s people suggests that the law it seeks to change is God’s law.**
- **Is there evidence in history that pinpoints the identity of the “little horn”? We need to find a religious-political power that rose with the decline of the Roman Empire. We need to find a power that defeated three of the ten European tribes (three of the ten horns uprooted). It must be a power that uses the force of the state as well as the authority of the church. It must persecute those who challenge its decrees.**

A Little Horn

- **“Rome, arose the great moral Empire in the ‘giant form’ of the Roman Church.” A.C. Flick, The Rise of the Medieval Church, (1900), p.150. Yes, the evidence shows that the medieval Roman Church fits this description very well.**
- **It wielded the power of the state. It persecuted those it regarded as heretics. It compromised truth. The church in its political/religious role fits the picture. Human tradition, church councils, and man-made decrees would take the place of the authority of God’s Word.**
- **The prophecy of Daniel 7 tells us how long this “little horn” would rule. “He shall . . . persecute the saints of the Most High. . . . Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time” (vs. 25).**
- **This same period is referred to as 1,260 prophetic days in Revelation 12:6, 14.**

A Little Horn

- **When we put together all the texts that mention this time period, we can calculate its duration this way:**
- **A time (year) = 360 prophetic days**
- **Times (two years) = 720 prophetic days**
- **Half time (half year) = 180 prophetic days**
- **Equals 1,260 prophetic days**

A Little Horn

- **In Bible prophecy, one prophetic day equals one literal year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). In Daniel 4:23 we learned that the “seven times” prophesied for Nebuchadnezzar’s derangement equalled seven years. A “time,” then, equals one year.**
- **There are 360 days in one year in the Jewish calendar. Taking all this information into account, we can decipher the prophecy.**
- **The “little horn” power, or church/state power, would reign for 1,260 years.**
- **During this time period, the medieval Roman Church would substitute human tradition for God’s Word and substitute man’s law for God’s law.**
- **One example was that a system of “works” was introduced that obscured God’s plan of forgiveness and salvation through grace alone.**

A Little Horn

- **THOUGHT QUESTION:** This little horn represents the Roman Church which was in power for 1,260 years—from A.D. 538 to 1798. (False or True)
- The little horn that came up out of the ten horns on the fourth beast represents a kingdom that has both political and religious power. (True or False)

Corruption in High Places

- **When the pagan Roman Empire ruled the world, there was only one Christian church.**
- **This was true for centuries after the death of Jesus.**
- **When the Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity, he declared the Christian faith to be the official state religion.**
- **Rome ruled the world. And so Christianity became a kind of “universal religion.”**

Corruption in High Places

- **But, as we've seen, that church became corrupted. Daniel 7 points out—and history verifies—that the church's authority and power took on a life of its own.**
- **Because of this, many earnest believers cried out for reform.**
- **Church leaders were abusing their privileges and exploiting the masses. Monks and priests like Martin Luther and John Huss called for a return to the pure gospel.**
- **They based their protests on the authority of God's Word.**
- **Because of the abuses, Martin Luther nailed his list of ninety-five points (describing how the "official church" teachings erred biblically) to the church door in the town of Wittenberg, Germany. The followers of Luther, Huss, and other reformers eventually came to be called Protestants (protestors), and Christendom divided into two main camps—Roman Catholic and Protestant.**

Corruption in High Places

- **Of course there were many sincere believers who remained in the Roman Church and who carried on Christ-like ministries.**
- **But this prophecy of the “little horn” focuses on the corruption in high places and the distortion of God’s truth that turned the church into an oppressive power.**
- **Scripture is zeroing in on that part of God’s church which betrayed His principles.**
- **(Further details regarding the “little horn” and Daniel 7 will be found in Lesson 15.)**
- **According to the explanation given to Daniel, at the end of the 1,260 day/year period “the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever” (vs. 26).**

Corruption in High Places

- **In the midst of the career of the little horn, Daniel saw the heavenly court convene (vss. 9-14, 22, 26-28).**
- **This new feature refers to the final judgment in heaven.**
- **After the close of the 1,260-year period referred to in verse 25, the great court would sit, and an investigation would be made of the lives of the people of Earth.**
- **What is the issue?**
- **Before Jesus returns to Earth for His people it must be revealed who has accepted Jesus into his or her life and who hasn't. That is the big question—what have you done with Jesus?**

Corruption in High Places

- **This has been called the investigative judgment, because the record books of heaven are examined so all can see that those who are saved, or not saved, have made the choice on their own. God is fair, just, merciful, and loving, and this special act before His return to Earth establishes that fact for all the universe. Verse 22 states that the oppression against God's people will end at the conclusion of the investigative judgment—and that Christians will be given the kingdom of heaven. God and His character are forever vindicated. (Lessons 5 and 6 will give further insight concerning the investigative judgment). Verse 27 tells us that when the court sits then the dominion of this persecuting power is about to end. And the next kingdom to arise will be God's kingdom.**

Corruption in High Places

- **“Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (vs. 27). The prophecy assures us that in the end God will set up His everlasting kingdom. Unlike the kingdoms of this world, God’s kingdom will never end.**
- **The key word in chapter 7 is “dominion” (vss. 6, 12, 14, 26, 27). Who will rule? Who will have dominion of this world? Political and religious forces struggle to exercise authority, often trampling upon the rights of Earth’s inhabitants and forcing the consciences of Christians. But God has not given up His authority. The dominion of the oppressors will be taken away. Judgment will be rendered in favor of God’s people. Jesus wins!**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: God promised Daniel that He would win the battle with Satan and set up an everlasting kingdom that He would give to His faithful people. (False or True)**

Daniel's Vision Fulfilled

- **HISTORY AND THE 1,260 YEARS OF THE ROMAN CHURCH RULE:**
***Newsweek* magazine (March 29, 1999, pp. 62, 63) had this to say about the period in history to which Daniel's prophecy refers: The legacy of medieval 'Christendom' had its darker side as well.**
- **Although the New Testament contains no outline for a Christian society, medieval Christianity was one long effort to establish one.**
- **The doctrine the church preached became the doctrine the king enforced. Even Augustine had reluctantly concluded that the secular arm of society could be used to crush heresy.**
- **Acting on the premise that error has no rights, the church created the Inquisition, dispatching traveling squads of Franciscans and Dominicans to ferret out heretics.**
- **In 1252 Pope Innocent IV allowed suspects to be tortured.**
- **The guilty were imprisoned and sometimes put to death. . . . Altogether, the Inquisition remains a monument to religious intolerance and a reminder of what can happen when church and state share total authority.**

Daniel's Vision Fulfilled

- **Thousands of years ago, Bible prophecy made bold declarations regarding what would happen to the church during a certain 1,260-year period. Newsweek's review of history unintentionally verifies how accurately prophecy was fulfilled. Let's look at a few more details that correspond to the details of the Daniel 7 prophecy.**
- **THE STARTING AND ENDING DATES OF THIS 1,260-YEAR PROPHECY**
- **The last of the three tribes (three horns) to be uprooted was the Ostrogoths in A.D. 538.**
- **This marked the rise of the "little horn" and marks the beginning date for the 1,260-year prophecy. Adding 1,260 years to A.D. 538 brings us to A.D. 1798.**
- **This year marks the decline of the "little horn" power. (More details about this are included in a future lesson.)**

Daniel's Vision Fulfilled

- **PERSECUTION AGAINST GOD'S PEOPLE:** Even though Daniel's prophecy highlights persecution by the medieval Roman Church, the "little horn," it must be remembered that Protestants also have warred against and persecuted others. In recent years around the world, there have been conflicts, massacres, and atrocities—people being killed and maimed in the name of religion—all committed by people claiming to be Christian.
- **God, however, wants us to understand that persecution by the "little horn" was something "dreadful and terrible."** It represented the ultimate union of church and state into an oppressive power. Historians differ in their estimates of how many people were killed by the persecution of the Dark Ages. All agree, however, that the terror of the Inquisition, the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, the crusades against the Waldenses and Albigenses, and other official acts of persecution form an especially dark chapter in church history.

Daniel's Vision Fulfilled

- **As we think about these statements of history, it's important to realize that Bible prophecies about the "little horn" are aimed at a religious system, not at individual believers and leaders who were faithful to Jesus and followed Him to the best of their knowledge.**
- **Daniel's prophecy is a way for God to warn us about the activity of the "little horn." But remember, God is still ultimately in control. Verses 26 and 27 emphasize the fact that this power's dominion will come to a decisive end.**

Daniel's Vision Fulfilled

- **What great event follows the “little horn”? The establishment of God’s “everlasting kingdom.” Verse 27 tells us: “All dominions shall serve and obey Him [God].”**
- **If you find some of the prophetic details in Daniel 7 troubling, you’re not alone. In verse 28, Daniel himself says that he was so troubled by the details of his dream that his face turned pale. No one likes to see suffering and persecution come on the world. It’s difficult to imagine Christians oppressing and fighting against each other.**
- **But that’s part of the disaster that sin creates; it’s the legacy of rebellion against God. Satan is the force behind all human animosity. But it’s God who works tirelessly for unity and peace.**

Conclusion

- **Jeremy had fallen for the same old sin again. He'd been struggling with a certain addiction for years, and now the old temptation had come back. He felt like such easy prey. Sitting alone in his messy apartment, he stared out the window at a gloomy sky and felt totally numb.**
- **Jeremy wanted to repent; he wanted to move beyond this destructive habit and get on with his life. But all his efforts seemed so futile. Jeremy almost wanted to give up. But something made him reach for a Bible on the kitchen table.**
- **Jeremy began reading in the Gospel of Luke and came to the scene where Pilate is asking the mob if he should release Jesus. The crowd thundered back, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And then Jeremy read a verse that gripped him. Luke stated, "And their voices prevailed." Suddenly Jeremy was wide-awake. This was what had just happened to him! Those ugly voices of the carnal nature had prevailed over him.**

Conclusion

- **That short sentence in the Gospel of Luke gave Jeremy a handle; now he could fight back in earnest. “Their voices prevailed” became a rallying cry, like “Remember the Alamo!”**
- **And Jeremy was able to get the best of his habit.**
- **God had given him just the message he needed at his moment of greatest discouragement.**
- **God is like that. He is eager to give us just what we need. There may be many ugly voices around us.**
- **There may be a lot of animosity.**
- **But our heavenly Father can break through with His voice of peace and comfort.**
- **He can make us strong as His voice prevails in our lives.**