

Ten kings will arise from the fourth kingdom, but one king will arise and dominate the others. We commonly call that one king the antichrist. Daniel's vision offers the first extended revelation in the Bible about the antichrist, and about the character of this "little horn" who speaks "boastful words," persecutes the saints of God, and openly blasphemes the Lord. He will set himself up as god on earth and command all people to worship him. He will "try to change the set times and the laws" (7:25). When the antichrist comes to power, wrong will become right and right will become wrong. Moral values will be inverted as the antichrist makes his final bid for world domination.

For three years the antichrist will reign supreme, but Jesus will destroy him and establish his kingdom on earth. The antichrist will be cut off at the height of his power, destroyed, defeated, and thrown alive into the lake of fire where he will be tortured forever (Rev. 19). This is the end of the little horn with the big mouth, the "Battle of the Big Little Horn," more commonly called the Battle of Armageddon. Jesus wins this cosmic battle and those who are joined with him by faith will share in his triumph.

That's a lot to take in! If we step back and survey this prophecy as a whole, we see that much of it has already been fulfilled, which ought to give us confidence that the rest of Daniel's vision will someday be fulfilled. So, as we wait for the vision to be fulfilled, here are six trends to watch for as the end of time approaches:

1. There will be a **dramatic rise in false Messiahs**. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24 to beware of false "Christs" and those who claim to come in his name (Matt. 24). In the last days spiritual counterfeits will appear who will lead many people astray.
2. The people will **search for a leader who can bring the world together**. The "little horn" will arise precisely because he promises to unite the nations. In our world today there are calls for a strong executive to enforce international law and to create a "one world government." We will hear much more talk like this in the future.
3. There will be **more bloodshed and violence** among the nations. Jesus said there will be "wars and rumors of wars" until he returns (Matt. 24:6). The strife won't diminish as we near the end; it will increase in fury and in tempo.
4. There will be **increasing hostility to Christians and to the gospel message**. Jesus warned his followers to expect trouble in the world (John 14:18-25): "If they hated me, they will hate you also." American Christians live in a kind of "bubble" of personal

peace and safety, while our brothers and sisters in places like Sudan, Somalia, India, and China, and in many other countries have paid in blood for their faith. Hard times are coming for those who profess Jesus as the Christ.

5. There will be a **massive rejection of traditional values**. The world seems determined to push God out, replacing God's morals with human ingenuity and intellect.
6. **Evil seems to win**. There will be times when the bad guys seem to have won it all. During the final years of the tribulation, it will look as if God has been dethroned and the world has fallen completely into the lap of the antichrist who will reign as a kind of "squatter king" over the world God created. He will "rule the roost" and appear to be invincible until he is forcibly and finally evicted by God.

What difference does all this make? After all, this is ancient prophecy that touches ancient history and yet-future events. Should it matter to us? How then should we live? Here are six answers to that question.

1. Daniel's vision should **increase our confidence in God**. God knows the future because God is the God of tomorrow. Though many things that happen around us make no sense at all, we can rest in the thought that God is working out God's plan step by step. God is not worried about the "little horn" or any other horn for that matter. Take heart and trust in God.
2. Daniel's vision should **give us patience while we wait**. Certainly this was a message the Jews in exile needed to hear. While we may not live to see the final fulfillment of Daniel's vision, we know that sooner or later, it's all going to happen just as God said it would. Be patient.
3. Daniel's vision should **wean us away from our trust in the kingdoms of this world**. Use the world but don't fall in love with it. Enjoy these days. Invest in the stock market. Build a career. Raise a family. None of those things are not bad or evil. But don't put your trust in them. The kingdoms and companies and careers of the world will come and they will go: only the Lord God stands forever. Trust in God.
4. Daniel's vision should **warn us against the spirit of antichrist** which is the spirit of this age. There are already in the world antichrists whose seductive purpose is to entice people into following them down the primrose path of personal destruction. Caring

only for themselves, they stop at nothing to gain a following. Be wary of anyone who promises you peace, safety, and security apart from God.

5. Daniel's vision should **call us to courage in the difficult days to come**. Daniel's vision predicts a deterioration of the spiritual condition as we enter the final period of world history. Our call is to be strong and of good courage while we wait for the Lord to return.
6. Daniel's vision should **remind us that those who belong to Christ are on the winning side**. As the gospel song says, I've read the end of the book and we win. Bad days are coming for planet earth, but in the end those who know the Lord will reign with him.

A few days ago I ran across a sentence that stuck in my mind: "All the threads of history lead to the throne room of God." How true that is. So many times the "threads" of life seem to dangle meaninglessly. Or they are entangled in a hopeless knot. If we could see the big picture, we would discover that every thread of life leads back to God.

Daniel's vision tells us that there are four kingdoms, and then a fifth. Today the world is in turmoil. Judgment has already begun as nations rise and fall, as killing continues around the world, and as our leaders repeatedly disappoint us. These things are but the beginning of sorrows. Yet we should not lose heart. The best and worst is yet to come. History is leading to an awesome climax as the antichrist briefly rules the world in a desperate bid to dethrone God Almighty. But, God Almighty is God All-Mighty. History leads to the antichrist but it doesn't stop there: it marches on to the return of Jesus Christ in power and glory.

God sees us in the midst of the swirling, fighting, bloodthirsty nations. God sees us in our confusion and in our frustration. God knows that we are easily baffled by circumstances and quickly led astray. We are part of that great roiling sea of humanity Daniel saw. In the midst of all that happens around us, God lays a hand on us and bids us to look up to God's throne, to look up to the Lord who holds history in holy hands. "Look up," Jesus said, "for your redemption draws near." Amen.

The Battle of the Big Little Horn

Sunday, March 1, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Daniel 7:1, 9-10, 23-27

The book of Daniel divides neatly into two parts. The first six chapters are biography, telling the story of Daniel's deportation to Babylon and his adventures in the courts of its kings. The last six chapters describe four visions given to Daniel that center around the nations and empires of the world, especially as they relate to God's plan for Israel.

The first vision is found in Daniel 7. One night Daniel had a vision in which he saw the four winds of heaven whipping up the waters of the sea. Without warning four beasts emerged from the sea: a lion with wings; a ferocious bear; a leopard with four wings and four heads; and finally an unidentified beast more terrible than the first three. The fourth beast had iron claws and ten horns on its head. As Daniel watched, a new, smaller horn came up from among the ten horns and conquered three of them. Then this "little horn" began to boast of its power and to blaspheme God. The Ancient of Days (God) then came to judge the world. The little horn and the fourth beast were destroyed and cast into burning flames. Then the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) came in power and glory to set up his kingdom on earth.

Daniel's vision shows the nature of every human kingdom: earthly, brutal, destructive, and ultimately temporary. Nothing made by the human hands lasts forever. One kingdom falls, another rises only to fall and have its place taken by yet another kingdom. This is the history of humanity until the end when Jesus Christ comes again and all earthly kingdoms are finally replaced by the kingdom of God. And that kingdom will last forever.

Let's put Daniel 7 into some historical perspective. Daniel saw four beasts coming out of the roiling, churning sea of humanity. The four beasts represent four great World empires: Babylon, Medo-Perisa, Greece, and Rome. The fourth kingdom, Rome, will exist in various forms until the Last Days. No empire ever arose to replace Rome: though that empire collapsed, the remnants of it continued in various forms for centuries, the Holy Roman Empire, the nation-states of Europe, and the modern nations of Europe. Thus, we can say that there have been only four great world empires from Daniel's day until our own; we are still in the general period of the fourth kingdom.