

God's Master Plan In Prophecy

Lesson 4 – Visions of the Four Great Beasts

Key Scriptures: Daniel 7:1-21; Revelation 13:1-10

Introduction

We have just studied in detail “the vision of the woman clothed with the sun” which John saw in the 12th chapter of Revelation. He saw this vision portrayed in the sky above the sea as he looked out from the isle of Patmos. In the 13th chapter of Revelation, the dragon – which represented the devil – stood on the sand of the seashore where John was and another vision begin to unfold with a great beast coming up out of the sea to join the dragon. It is this vision that we want to seek to understand, but to understand this great beast, we must first turn our attention to a vision that God gave to the prophet Daniel and that he recorded in the 7th chapter of Daniel hundreds of years before John was born.

Dan 7:1-2 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. 2 Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

It is remarkable the similarities between Daniel and John the Apostle: both were in exile, John on an island and Daniel in Babylon; both were faithful to God despite the situation of their life; both are called by God “beloved;” both saw great visions that foretold the future as scenes played out above and rising from out of the sea. To the land-loving Israelites the sea represented the unknown and the mysterious and thus God uses the most appropriate medium to reveal to his beloved servants “great revelations” about what been previously hidden from mankind.

The similarities between Daniel and John's situations are remarkable!

That John saw similar visions to Daniel's dreams after the Ascension of Jesus tells us that these prophecies have both an immediate fulfillment which spoke to Christ's first coming and a distant fulfillment which speaks to Christ's second coming. We will try to understand the prophecies of Daniel from both viewpoints.

Daniel's Vision of the Beasts – The Immediate Fulfillment

Dan 7:3 "And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.

The term “beasts” is used in both Daniel and Revelation and seems more ominous to us than it should be. The term simply means “a wild, dangerous animal” and the point was that these were not animals that man easily tamed or ordinarily keep for pets. That God used such imagery here was to let Daniel know that humans would not be able to stop these events from happening and “tame them” but that they would do as they wanted and as the Word of God said. Daniel saw four of these beasts; let's take them one by one:

Dan 7:4 "The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

The first animal was a lion with eagle's wings. The wings were plucked from the lion and made to stand upon the feet as a man and "a human mind was given to it."

Dan 7:5 "And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!'

The second animal was a vicious bear lying on one side that had three ribs in its mouth.

Dan 7:6 "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

The third animal was like a leopard except that it had four wings and four heads and dominion was given to it.

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Dan 7:7-8 "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 "While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

The fourth animal was extremely different from the first three. No description of a particular animal was given, but a strong beast is described with great iron teeth that is able to destroy. It also had ten horns. Among the ten horns, another smaller horn arose and plucked up the first three horns by the roots. Throughout the Bible, "horns" are representative of strength, might, authority, and leadership and from this verse it is fairly obvious that the horns represent leaders who are men.

Dan 7:9-10 "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. 10 "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

The "Ancient of days" can only refer to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and this description of Jesus Christ matches perfectly with the one given later by John.¹ Whatever is represented by these four beasts are upon the earth immediately before Jesus Christ brings judgment. We now know that Jesus Christ will come to earth twice: the first to bring judgment upon sin through the cross and resurrection and the second time to judge the world for their sin. Therefore these beasts represent in the immediate fulfillment, something that would be on the earth prior to Christ's first coming. Gratefully, we do not have to guess as to what the animals represent because that much was revealed unto Daniel:

Dan 7:16-18 "I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: 17 'These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. 18 'But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.'

An angel told Daniel that these four beasts represented kings and their kingdoms. In modern terms, we would say that these beasts represent nations or kingdoms or some sort of governmental body that would "arise from the earth" before Jesus Christ came.¹ The angel then went on to give more detail about the fourth kingdom but before we get to those verses, let's go back to the four beasts and see how their prophecies were immediately fulfilled before the first time that Jesus came, being born in Bethlehem.

The first beast was characterized by a lion with eagle's wings. This represented the kingdom of Babylon. We know this because Babylon is described throughout the prophets as a lion.² The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was also alluded to as flying "as an eagle."³ The lion is the "king of the beasts" and the eagle is the "king of the birds" and, in like manner, Babylon was the grandest kingdom of all. Nebuchadnezzar, was also typified by the eagle's wings being plucked out from the lion and given the mind of a man because when Nebuchadnezzar decided that he was great and mighty and that it was his work that had formed the great kingdom of Babylon, God decided to strike him with insanity for seven years to teach him humility.⁴ During this time of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar became as a wild animal, eating grass and living in the fields and growing hair "as eagles' feathers."⁵ⁱⁱ

The second beast, the bear, has its immediate fulfillment found in the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. This kingdom took over Babylon under the guidance of the great King Cyrus. The Medes and the Persians were known for their cruelty, thus the symbolism of a vicious bear. The three ribs are an allusion to the three chief conquests of the empire: the areas of Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt.⁶

¹ See Revelation 1:13-16.

² See Jeremiah 4:7; Isaiah 5:29.

³ See Jeremiah 48:40; Ezekiel 17:3,7.

⁴ See the 4th chapter of Daniel.

⁵ See Daniel 4:33.

⁶ The conquest of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians is described in the 5th chapter of Daniel.

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The third beast was a four-headed leopard and represents the kingdom formed by Alexander the Great of the Grecians. Between the Old and New Testaments, in 334 B.C., Alexander the Great set out to conquer the world. The leopard and the wings are used to demonstrate the swiftness and speed with which he conquered the nations. When Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his four generals, thus fulfilling the four heads of the beasts. The names of the four generals were Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Cassander, and Seleucus. The analogy of the leopard is very fitting for Alexander the Great's conquest, because the spots represented the diversities of cultures that were tied together under his kingdom. Also, in nature, a leopard is one of the few creatures not afraid to attack a lion or a bear!

The fourth beast that was different from all of the others represented the great Roman Empire. Their well-trained armies conquered the known world just before the time of Christ. The Romans fearlessly crushed all opposition until the vast majority of the world was under their power. They conquered the Jewish people and Judea in 63 B.C. and Jesus Christ was born during the time of Roman rule. Pilate, who ordered His crucifixion, was a Roman governor of the area. The ten horns of the beast represent the ten initial divisions of the Roman Empire.ⁱⁱⁱ They were as follows:

1. *The Roman senate*
2. *The Greeks, in Ravenna*
3. *The Lombards in Lombardy*
4. *The Huns in Hungary*
5. *The Alemans, in Germany*
6. *The Franks in France*
7. *The Burgundians in Burgundy*
8. *The Saracens in Africa, and a part of Spain*
9. *The Goths, in other parts of Spain.*
10. *The Saxons, in Britain.*

In the vision, God was telling Daniel that the kingdoms of Babylon, the Medes and Persians, the Grecians, and the Romans had to arise on earth before Jesus Christ's first coming, and it would not be until after that the Roman empire was established, that Jesus Christ came and set up His kingdom. But Jesus' first kingdom was to be a spiritual one that would last forever and that would be a kingdom of saints who had been saved by the power of His blood. These prophecies have come true, for we, today, are living proof that His spiritual kingdom has far outlived the Roman Empire!

Daniel's Vision of the Beasts – The Distant Fulfillment

We now know what these beasts represented before Christ's first coming, but what nations do they represent that must be upon the earth before Jesus Christ's second coming? As the law of the double fulfillment of prophecy holds true and because of the fact that Jesus is coming to the earth twice, these beasts also represent nations or kingdoms that must arise from the earth before Christ can return again. If we are truly living in the end times, then we should be able to recognize some of them.

Dan 7:4 "The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

There is a nation today that uses the lion as its national symbol: England, and there is also a nation today that uses the eagle as its national symbol: the United States of America! The distant fulfillment of this prophecy is found in these two nations, for the eagle wings – America – was plucked out of the lion – England – in 1776 during the Revolutionary War! The eagle's wings – America – then developed a democratic system of government which allowed all men to be represented as equal, thus a "man's mind was given to it." The incredible point about this scripture is that God gave Daniel a true portrait of the American War for Independence thousands of years before it occurred because God knew that these two great countries would have to arise from the earth before Jesus Christ's second coming!

Dan 7:5 "And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!'

There is also a country that is represented by a bear and great violence: Russia. In terms of size, the bear is the largest of all of the creatures presented and so it is with the anti-type of Russia. There are three countries that Russia violently took from China through nineteenth century treaties and they are all on one side of Russia: Manchuria, Mongolia, and Sinkiang. Those three countries have become the source of much fighting and dispute between China and Russia and are probably the fulfillment of the three ribs in the mouth of the bear. As to the fulfillment of the "devouring" and violent

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nature of the bear, one only has to look to Communist history to see that what God predicted thousands of years ago has come true!

Dan 7:6 "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

There is also a modern nation that has repeatedly used the leopard for their symbol: Germany. The verse says that "dominion was given to it" and it is a historical fact that Germany's hunger for power has caused the last three major world wars on earth: The Franco-German war of 1870, World War I, and World War II. The Germans have even named their famous armed tank the "leopard tank." The verse also said that the leopard had "four heads." Germany has currently risen to power four separate times, each known as "Reichs." The First Reich ended with the Franco-German War. The Second Reich ended with World War I. The Third Reich, the most famous one under Adolph Hitler, ended with their defeat at the end of World War II. Today, Germany is united again and the "Fourth Reich" is now growing rapidly and the fourth head of the leopard is already in place!

Dan 7:7-8 "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 "While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

Right now, nobody can really be certain as to the distant fulfillment of this fourth beast. It could already exist on earth or could yet be formed in the future. It appears to be a coalition between ten kings or kingdoms that come together in a way different from the other countries mentioned above. Many possibilities have been suggested as to its identity, some of the more popular which I will briefly mention:

1. *The European Union* – Many of the nations of Europe have now come together in an economic union; they now have a common currency and a common passport.^{iv} If they are to be the fourth beast, however, several nations will have to drop out because there are currently more than 10 nations in the union.
2. *Another Soviet Union* – With the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia lost power over many now independent states and regions. It is possible that there could be a future reunion of these republics.
3. *The Arab World* – This is an increasing possibility of which to be aware. It is possible that many of the anti-Israel regimes of the world would combine forces to become an economic super-power.

Whether or not any of these will be the fulfillment of this fourth beast we do not know, but one point is clear: an important world leader to end time events will arise out of this ten nation alliance, and when he does, he will do so by overpowering three of the nations or leaders. This alliance will be upon the earth before Jesus Christ returns the second time! The chapter goes on to give more information about this fourth beast:

Dan 7:19-20 "Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, 20 and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates.

There is extra information that was given here, that the beast had "claws of bronze" or brass. Brass and bronze is always a symbol of sin in scripture. That the nation would be characterized by sin fits the immediate fulfillment of the prophecy through the Roman Empire, and will no doubt fit the distant fulfillment of the empire from which this prominent world leader, the little horn, arises. Daniel wanted to know more about the "little horn" and so God showed him more of the vision:

Dan 7:21-22 "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them 22 until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.

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It is here that the identity of “the little horn” and the correlation with our previous studies becomes clear because this little horn, made war with the saints! Obviously this prominent world leader will be the Antichrist that we have studied in our previous lessons. It is impossible to be sure if the “saints” refers to natural Israel or the church, but in light of our last lesson, it probably refers to both.^v This verse’s events coincides perfectly with the Vision of Daniel’s 70 weeks and the Woman Clothed with the Sun. Daniel’s 70 weeks were the end time events through the perspective of God’s dealing with Israel. The vision of the Woman Clothed with the Sun that John saw in the 12th chapter of Revelation was a view of end time events through the perspective of the spirit world. This vision of the beasts that both Daniel and John saw are a revelation of end time events from the perspective of prominent kingdoms and nations.

John’s Vision of the Beasts

Now that we understand the prophecies of Daniel’s visions of the beasts, let’s look at a similar vision that John saw:

Rev 13:1-2 And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

Like Daniel, John saw his vision rising from the sea and the parallel is unmistakable, but this time John saw only one beast with characteristics of the separate beasts that Daniel saw. This one beast had seven heads and ten horns exactly like Daniel’s fourth beast, but it also looked like the leopard, had the feet of the bear, and the mouth of the lion. And the dragon⁷ is what gave the beast its power!

This vision is remarkable in many ways because it proves what we have already discovered, that both Daniel and John saw different visions of the same subject. But now the beast is spoken of as only one beast, and it is as if all of the beasts of Daniel’s vision have merged together into one powerful creature! What this represents has not yet happened, because it is telling us that the ten-nation union, Russia, Germany, and England will come together in a one-world government that will be orchestrated by the plan of the devil.⁸ Also notice the beast’s crowns, or rulers, will come from the ten-nation union, it will find its stability from Russia, and the mouth, or language, common to this government will be the mouth of the lion. Is it coincidence that the common international language in the world today is English?

It is also important to notice that there is one animal missing: the eagle. And so obviously, America will not be a part of this government! It is possible that America could be initially joined with them but eventually withdraw. The only other reference in Revelation about the eagle we covered in our last lesson:

Rev 12:14 But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

The woman represented the nation of Israel and when the devil began to persecute her, she escaped because of the help of “two wings of the great eagle!” This cannot refer to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon because it was written hundreds of years after that kingdom’s fall. It is obvious that America has a role in end-time prophecy to protect Israel and deliver her from the hand of the Antichrist, and it will primarily be the help of America that protects the Jewish nation in the final three and a half years of Daniel’s seventieth week. With these verses in mind, it is no wonder that God has blessed our nation and allowed us to become a great military might: for we have an important end-time role to play!^{vi} This also helps prove that the Antichrist will claim to have dominion over the entire world but in truth will not.

Rev 13:3 I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;

There has been much speculation over this verse and some have interpreted it to mean that the Antichrist will be assassinated and then brought back to life. While that is certainly a possibility, there is not much scripture to support it. One of the “heads” represents one of the kingdoms that has joined together and to be consistent with the other scriptures I think that this verse would have to refer to the fall and rise of one of the nations represented.^{vii}

⁷ Which we know from the 12th chapter of Revelation represents the devil. See Revelation 12:9.

⁸ This is further proved by the characteristic of the beast’s having seven heads and ten diadems or crowns. See Revelation 12:3.

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Rev 13:4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, " Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

When people pledge their lives in honor of the one world government, they will actually be worshipping Satan because he is the one who will give the government its power! Remember that the Antichrist will rule for the first three and a half years of Daniel's seventieth week with a message of peace. Unfortunately, many people will be fooled into thinking that he is someone good when in actuality he is extremely evil.

Rev 13:5-6 There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

Here is a reference to the Abomination of Desolation because the beast will blaspheme God and "his tabernacle." Once the "beast" received his power from Satan, he continued for forty-two months. Forty-two months is exactly three and a half years and again we find that each vision in Revelation correlates to the others.⁹

Rev 13:7-8 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Because of the reference to forty-two months, leads to the beast to attack the saints, there can be no doubt that these verses are describing the last three and a half years of Daniel's seventieth week and the 1,260 days of John's vision of the Woman Clothed With the Sun. And yet again we have a reference to the Antichrist's persecution against the Apostolic church. The reason is that the vast majority of the world will worship the Antichrist and his message of peace, except for those who have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. While most of the world will be deceived, the church of the living God will not be fooled!^{viii}

Rev 13:9-10 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

God gives some advice to the Apostolic church which is very similar to the advice given to Peter after he had chopped off Malchus' ear: "if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed." In other words, it is not the will of God for Christians to respond to the fulfillment of these events by physical violence or by assassination attempts. The Christians must choose to live peacefully as Jesus did and trust completely in God.

That God is commanding the Christians not to physically fight, is another proof that the church will still be on the earth at this time. In Revelation chapter 19, when the church is coming back with Jesus Christ to fight for Israel after the rapture of the church, we are compared to a great army. The commandments of Revelation chapter 13 must refer to a different time frame before the Rapture of the church because, during Grace, God has commanded us not to retaliate with violence! Of course, we can fight spiritually and it will be the church's finest hour:

Dan 11:32 "By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action.

Those who support the Abomination of Desolation and break the covenant with the Antichrist, will be treated kindly by the evil one. But the people who know better, and know that Jesus Christ is the one, true, living God will "display strength and take action!" We will be able to literally quote "greater is he that is in me, than he that is in the world!" God will not fail His people, but will use the persecution to revive spiritually dead places across the globe, and one of the goals of these lessons are to equip you so that you will not be deceived during that day and will stand strong for God in the end-times!

⁹ And once again we find the time period of 3½ years in prophetic scriptures: 1,260 days, 42 months, half of seven years, and "time, times, and half a time" all mean the same thing!

Endnotes

Notice also that it is prophesied that after Jesus Christ came, the "saints" would take over and possess the kingdom forever! This was true in the formation of the Apostolic Church after Christ's first coming and this will be true in the Millennial Reign that immediately follows Christ's second coming.

ⁱⁱ The eagle's wings had represented the speed that the lion – Babylon – had conquered the world, but God took the symbolism and made it a reminder that he was only a man! After this experience, God restored Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar was an humble and God-fearing man for the remainder of his life.

ⁱⁱⁱ The three horns that will be plucked up by the little horn find their immediate fulfillment in the establishment of the Pope as a political leader as well as a spiritual one in the eighth century. The first pope to be given real legal power of government was Stephen II who was given complete control of the area of Ravenna in A.D. 755 by the King of France, Pepin (the first horn). The second such delegation was the Pope Peter (not the apostle) in A.D. 774 who was given the area of the Lombards by Charlemagne (the second horn). Eventually the line of popes was given an area of Rome which is now known as the Vatican and is actually considered it's own country (the third horn). Today the Pope is considered by the Roman Catholic Church, at least in theory, to be the "ruler of the earth." When we study the Antichrist, we will find that the little horn that arises represents the Antichrist, and the Antichrist will use the Roman Catholic Church to fulfill his purpose! The little horn (the Antichrist) will uproot the previous three horns by claiming for himself the power that they desire.

^{iv} The common arguments for the European Union being the fulfillment of the fourth beast are that their common currency is similar to the plan of the Antichrist's "mark," their area is much of the same area once controlled by the Roman Empire, and the person chosen to be portrayed for the first coin of their currency, the "euro," was the Roman emperor Charlemagne.

^v We will discuss this future world leader in detail in a future lesson, but for now it is good to note that the terms "Antichrist," "little horn," "man of sin," and "son of perdition" all synonymously refer to this same person.

^{vi} Just for fun, consider another, well-known eagle scripture. Isaiah wrote:

Isa 40:30-31 Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, 31 Yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

Though many a Christian has and will continue to apply this spiritually to their lives and be blessed by these scriptures, the context of the verses are to natural Israel and God is talking about how that even though Israel will have to endure some hardships and attacks of the enemy because of their past idolatry that He will deliver them and save them. One way that they will be saved, will be to "mount up with wings like eagles." The imagery is too close to the 12th chapter of Revelation to ignore and it could be that God even then was revealing to us America's role to play in future events!

^{vii} Looking through these nation's histories, it is very probable that this wounded head that is restored speaks of Germany. After World War II it was proclaimed that a united Germany would never rise again. The Allies split the country into a west Germany and an east Germany with the Berlin wall separating the two. Yet, in 1989, the wall fell and Germany was once again united! The "ugly wound" that had separated Germany was healed and now they have industrially and politically come to life. God has allowed this to happen because they have scriptures to fulfill in the future one-world government.

^{viii} It is also important to notice that there must be a difference between the Antichrist being given power over all nations and actually having perfect control of all nations. We have already seen how that Israel will rebel and with the help of America stand against the persecution. At least two nations will not give in to his demands although the political pressure to do so will be tremendous. Also in the 8th and 11th chapters of Daniel we find the Antichrist having to fight several wars close to him in Jerusalem. Why would he have to fight if there were not other areas of resistance to his plan?!