

Manna for Your Soul

Babylonian Winged-Lion

Friday, December 2, 2005

“The first was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man’s heart was given to it.”
Daniel 7:4

Looking at the Word:

As in all apocalyptic literature, the imagery of Daniel chapter seven is rich in symbolism. Daniel’s dream opens up with a fantastic scene of four hybrid animals emerging out of a wind-tossed sea. God chose to clothe His revelation of man’s future with drama, simile, metaphor, allegory, and scriptural allusion. Daniel’s dream reveals and conceals at the same time. Even when God gave Daniel an interpretation of what he has seen, the reader is left to wrestle with the mystery of God’s revelation.

- **The Winged-Lion:** The first animal to emerge from the sea was a creature having the head and body of a lion with the wings of an eagle. It represented the Babylonian Empire. Both lion and eagle were used to symbolize this nation. Babylonian kings had figures of winged-lions adorning their palaces. Each time Daniel left the city of Babylon he would have passed by the huge winged-lions guarding the Ishtar Gate. Undoubtedly Daniel would also have been aware of the Hebrew prophets’ usage of the lion (Jeremiah 4:7; 50:17, 44) and eagle (Jeremiah 49:22; Ezekiel 17:3; Habakkuk 1:8) to picture Babylon and its king. The winged-lion would have aptly pictured the vicious cruelty and speed of the Babylonian army as it swept across the Middle East in conquest.
- **The Wing-Plucked Lion Standing with a Man’s Heart:** As Daniel continued to carefully observe, he noted a transformation take place with the lion: 1) Its wings were pulled off (lost its ability to fly); 2) It was lifted up to stand on its back feet like a man; and 3) It was given a man’s heart. There are two major interpretations set forth by Bible believing scholars.
 - **A King (Kingdom) Is Ennobled:** Many modern dispensationalists have understood this verse as an allusion to the humiliation and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in Daniel 4:28-37 (Pentecost, Walvoord, Wood, etc.). In this view, the plucked wings supposedly point to God’s breaking Nebuchadnezzar’s pride; and the lion standing on its feet and being given a man’s heart is said to mirror the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar which resulted in a more humanitarian reign following his restoration to the throne. However, while the king did humbly acknowledge God’s supreme sovereignty, there is no indication from either history or the Biblical text that a kinder and gentler Babylonian administration was ever in play (either with Nebuchadnezzar or any of the other Babylonian kings that followed him).
 - **A Kingdom Is Weakened:** Older commentators saw this not as God ennobling Babylon but as emasculating the kingdom. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon’s army was renowned, like a lion, was for its ferocity. Like an eagle, Babylon rose quickly to prominence and soared above all other nations in sovereign glory. At the time when Daniel received this vision Babylon was still basking in the glory of Nebuchadnezzar—but Babylon was not destined to rule forever. The Lord plucked its wings. Babylon would no longer soar above other nations. We sometimes speak of a man having uncommon bravery as being “lionhearted.” God replaced the lion’s heart with that of a mere man. Calvin wrote that God reduced the “Chaldeans to their ordinary condition, and that they were no longer like a lion, but like private men deprived of their power and strength (Calvin vol. 13. page 14).” Along this same vein, Matthew Henry observed, “Sometimes the valor of a nation strangely sinks, and it becomes cowardly and effeminate, so that what was the head of the nations in an age or two becomes the tail (Matthew Henry, vol. 4, page 1071).” Instead of ruling other nations Babylon would itself be ruled.

Application and Meditation:

As the winged-lion symbolized Babylon, so the lion and eagle represent England and the United States respectively. God has had a time table when different nations have risen to supremacy; a time for a nation to soar high above its fellows and a time when wings are plucked out. As Daniel served both God and king in his day we need to serve as loyal citizens within our respective nations today, but more importantly, as faithful servants of the King of kings. © Mike Davidson