

Manna for Your Soul

The Persian Bear

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

“And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and *it had* three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh.” **Daniel 7:5**

Looking at the Word:

As Daniel continued to gaze in the direction of the wind-tossed sea, his attention was drawn to the second of four dream creatures. It had characteristics “like to a bear” and represented the Persian Empire.

- **The Bear:** The animal that served as a model for Daniel’s second dream creature was probably the Syrian bear. Though extinct today (last observed in 1932), it once ranged throughout Eurasia from present day Turkey to Iran and was known for its formidable strength and ferocity (2 Kings 2:42; Proverbs 17:12; Hosea 13:8; Amos 5:19). Its natural habitat was in the mountains, but it would also come down occasionally to prey upon sheep and goats. David gave testimony to King Saul that he had killed a bear while watching his father’s sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-37). While a bear would be a fit simile for any king or empire it was especially appropriate for Cyrus and Persia for “like the bear, he came from the mountains, in contradistinction from the lion {Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon} of the plains.” (The Pulpit Commentary: Daniel, page 210)
- **The Bear Rising Up On One Side:** The Persian Empire had its birth in the assimilation of the kingdom of Media into Persia. The political reality of Persian dominance was pictured prophetically by the bear lifted up on one side. Herodotus records Cyrus’ rise to power in his *Histories*. He relates that Cyrus was the son of a Persian nobleman and the daughter of King Astyages of Media. Cyrus ruled the small kingdom of Anshan, located in what is today southwestern Iran as a vassal to his grandfather. Years earlier Astyages had a dream which his wise men interpreted to mean his daughter’s son would supplant him on the throne. Consequently, Astyages attempted to have Cyrus murdered while still an infant, but failed. As a result Cyrus had little love for Astyages.
According to Herodotus the general of Media’s army Harpagus (who had also been wronged by King Astyages) wrote to Cyrus promising him his support, should Cyrus decide to lead a rebellion. This was all the encouragement Cyrus needed. Hungering for more territory and power, Cyrus organized the other tribes of Persia into an armed revolt against the Medes and eventually took Ecbatana, the capital city of Media, in 549 BC. While Cyrus accepted the throne of Media, his official title was King of Persia. Before his death, Astyages had been allied with his brother-in-law King Croesus of Lydia, King Nabonidus of Babylon, and Pharaoh Amasis II of Egypt. Many Bible students believe that Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt are represented by the three ribs held in the bear’s teeth. Herodotus reports that these three allies intended to unite their armies against Cyrus but their plans were never realized because Cyrus struck first. He conquered Lydia in 546 BC and Babylon in 539 BC. His successor, Darius I expanded Persian control still farther when the Persian army conquered Egypt in 525 BC.
- **The Bear Commanded to Eat:** In Daniel’s dream there was a command given the bear to “Arise, devour much flesh.” The voracious appetite of Daniel’s dream-bear was mirrored in the Persian Empire’s acquisition of territory. By the time Cyrus died in 530 BC, Persia had amassed the largest empire the world had seen up to that time. Starting in the West from Turkey and the Palestinian shoreline along the Mediterranean it stretched as far as the Indus valley in the East.

Application and Meditation:

Psalm 75:6-7 “For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” History offers a wealth of details as to how a nation rises or falls, but in truth it is of the Lord whether a nation lives or dies. As believers we need to be in constant prayer for the health and prosperity of our nation. © Mike Davidson