

The ABC of Bible Prophecy

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In secular education the elementary, basic principles are three in number-Reading, 'Biting, and 'Rithmetic. Nothing that is properly taught in the centers of higher education later is ever found to be in conflict with these three R's taught in the kindergarten and grade school.

So it is in the school of prophecy. Here, while we do not find any three R's, we do, nevertheless, find certain basic, elementary prophecies, the meaning of which, being divinely given, cannot be mistaken.

In all there are seven of these prophecies, and together they might well be called the ABC of Bible prophecy; and it is important to remember that none of the lessons we may learn as we progress in our studies in the school of prophecy will ever be found to conflict with these basic ones.

All seven of these ABC prophecies are found in the Book of Daniel and the Revelation-five in Daniel and two in the Revelation. While they are seven in number, they have to do with but one main subject. On this occasion I propose to review briefly all seven of them.

No. 1- THE GREAT IMAGE

The first prophecy is recorded in the second chapter of Daniel, and is the interpretation of the great Image.

You will remember the circumstances: Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had had a dream. When he awoke he could not remember it. In answer to prayer, both the dream and its meaning were revealed to Daniel. The dream, as recalled to Nebuchadnezzar by Daniel, is given in verses 31-35: "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

As Nebuchadnezzar listened, he could not fail to recognize his dream, and therefore he realized that Daniel could not have recalled it to his

mind unaided, but, as he had himself stated, had had the dream revealed to him by the God of Heaven whom he served. Realizing, therefore, that a prophet of God stood before him, Nebuchadnezzar was prepared to listen carefully, as Daniel proceeded to interpret the dream, which he did as recorded in verses 36-45.

Mark the introductory words: "This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.

1. "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

2. "And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee,

3. "And another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

4. "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, So the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken [fragile. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

5. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."

In this divinely given interpretation, the four different metallic parts of the Image represent four successive kingdoms, of which the first is Babylon; while the Stone cut out without hands which destroys the Image, becomes a Mountain, and fills the earth, represents the Kingdom of the God of heaven, universal in its range, and everlasting in its duration. Five kingdoms in all, of which the first is Babylon and the fifth the Kingdom of God.

Let us note that the four kingdoms follow each other without any gap, as represented by the four parts of a single Image; that the second is inferior to the first; that the third is characterized by world-wide extent, and the

fourth by resistless strength and all-subduing conquests. Observe especially that the fourth kingdom is in its later stage "divided," that it consists partly of iron and partly of clay, and that the attempts to reunite its broken fragments prove vain and futile. Contrast the great Colossus of human sovereignty, standing on feeble, fragile feet of iron mixed with clay, with the stable and everlasting Mountain of the Kingdom of God. Observe the superhuman origin of the final Kingdom represented by a Stone cut out without hands—a Kingdom founded by no sword or scepter of man, built by no human will or wisdom, but by the invisible power of the Creator of heaven and earth. Note also the two stages of the Kingdom represented by the Stone and the Mountain, and that before the Stone becomes the Mountain, it falls on the Image in its finally divided clay and iron state, and utterly annihilates it.

The first and the last of the five kingdoms are clearly and authoritatively interpreted as the Kingdom of Babylon and the Kingdom of the God of heaven; while the second, third, and fourth are the intervening kingdoms which fill up the course of Gentile rule between these two well-marked termini. Later visions plainly show what these intervening kingdoms are.

No. 2—THE GREAT TREE

So much for the first of the seven ABC prophecies. Let us turn next to the second. It is found in the fourth chapter of Daniel, and is the interpretation of the great Tree.

Observe once again the words of Daniel: "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High."

Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream a great Tree, reaching to heaven, under whose shadow dwelt the birds and beasts of the earth. He had heard a voice from heaven proclaim the decree "Hew down the tree," but "leave the stump of his roots in the earth," and "let seven times pass over him."

Daniel thus interprets the dream: "It is thou, O king." (Ver. 22.) As in the former vision Daniel had said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold," so here he boldly tells the monarch that the vision concerns himself. He, Nebuchadnezzar, was symbolized by the great Tree; his far-reaching dominion by its widely extending branches; and his temporary abasement during the period of seven times was represented by the cutting down of the Tree, whose stump was left bound with iron and brass in the soil during this predicted period. "They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field ... and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." The rest of the chapter relates the historical fulfillment of the vision: "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar."

That is as far as the divine interpretation goes. "It is thou, O king." Daniel's interpretation of the dream relates only to its fulfillment upon

Nebuchadnezzar; but the fact that the dream and the interpretation and the fulfillment are all so carefully related here is evidence of an object in its narration. And its remarkable fitness as an illustration of the divine purpose in subjecting the whole race to the dominion of evil for its punishment and correction, that in due time God might restore and establish it in righteousness and everlasting life, warrants us in accepting it as an intended type.

The seven times of Nebuchadnezzar's degradation proved to be seven literal years, when actually fulfilled in his experience. But they were typical of a longer period. They were typical of seven symbolic times.

A remarkable scale for measuring the duration of the period indicated has been furnished in the Old Testament. It is known as the year-day scale: that is, a day in prophecy stands as a symbol for a year. A year, sometimes called a time, and reckoned as containing 360 days, stands as a symbol for 360 years. This scale is subject to minor modifications, depending on whether lunar, calendar, or solar years are intended. Such minor modifications are, of course, important, and must not be overlooked when students are seeking precise computations. However, a detailed consideration of them would be going beyond the scope of our discussion here. Suffice it to say now that, using the year-day scale, Nebuchadnezzar's seven times, considered typically, are seen to extend over the long period of 2520 years.

This period is now ending, and agencies are at work on every hand pointing to a termination of the old order, and the establishment of the coming Kingdom of God on earth.

No. 3-THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Our third ABC prophecy is found in the fifth chapter of Daniel. It is the interpretation of the handwriting on the wall of Belshazzar's palace.

At Belshazzar's feast the golden vessels from the temple at Jerusalem were profaned by being used for the worship of gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. It was the culmination of the sin of Babylon.

Silently her doom was written. "In the same hour," we read, "came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

Moved by curiosity and consternation the king asks his wise men to interpret the mysterious words upon the wall; but none of them can do it. At the queen mother's suggestion he sends for Daniel. Evidently she, a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, had profited by the Lord's judgment and mercy upon her father, for she seems to have been the only one of the palace who had taken no part in the impious banquet.

The aged Prophet stands in the presence of the illustrious monarch and, while refusing his proffered gifts, says: "I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation ... This is the writing that was written, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Peres; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

History, both sacred and secular, records the fulfillment of this prophecy. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. The Kingdom of Babylon, proud, sensual, and idolatrous, fell before the MedoPersian power. In the interpretation of the word "Peres," the Prophet plainly indicates the name of the second of the four kingdoms, that of the Medes and Persians. Thus the silver breast and arms of the great image are interpreted. As the first of the four kingdoms is Babylon, So the second is Persia. In accepting this interpretation we build on plain statements in the Word of God, confirmed by the witness of history.

No. 4-Tim RAM Arm THE HE-GOAT

The interpretation of the Ram and the He-goat in the eighth chapter of Daniel is the fourth of the ABC prophecies I wish to consider. I am discussing this prophecy before I turn to the one in the seventh chapter, because it gives us the name of the third empire.

The Persian power is represented in this vision by a Ram, while the power which destroyed and succeeded it is depicted by a He-goat.

The Ram has two horns, and is thus interpreted: "The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia."

The He-goat that came from the west on the face of the whole earth and touched not the ground, which had a notable horn between his eyes, and which smote the Ram and brake his two horns and cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him, is thus interpreted: "The rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king."

Turning to history, what do we find? Events which exactly correspond to the prophecy.

Prophecy and history agree in determining the Grecian Empire to be the third in the succession of world empires, of which Babylon and MedoPersia were the first and second respectively.

If we ask the name and character of the fourth empire, the New Testament supplies the answer: "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." (Luke 2:1.) "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." (John 11:48.) Four supreme and ruling kingdoms, and four only, are announced by name in the Word of

God, from the time of Daniel to the close of the sacred Canon of Scripture.

No. 5-THE FOUR WILD BEASTS

For our fifth ABC prophecy we turn back to the seventh chapter of Daniel. Here Daniel presents the interpretation of the four Wild-Beast kingdoms and of the Kingdom of the Son of Man.

The narrative of the vision of the four Wild Beast empires and the Kingdom of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 occupies the first 14 verses, while the interpretation follows in verses 16-27. Note the words: "So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things."

First, a general interpretation is given of the four Wild Beast powers and of the kingdom of the saints of the most High (17, 18), and then a more detailed interpretation of the fourth kingdom. "The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces." Here, as in the symbol of the great Image, a tenfold division of the Roman Empire is predicted. In the vision of the Image the interpretation went: "The kingdom shall be divided. .. As the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, So the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken [fragile." (2:41, 42.) In the vision of the Wild Beasts we are now considering, this tenfold division is represented by the ten horns of the fourth Wild Beast. Among these rises another little horn with eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things, which horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, for a definite period. "They shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." -7:25-27.

No. 6-THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS, And No. 7-THE WOMAN, BABYLON THE GREAT

The sixth and seventh ABC prophecies appear in the Book of Revelation.

The sixth is the interpretation of the Seven Stars and Seven Candlesticks of chapter one, while the seventh appears in chapter seventeen, and is the interpretation of the Woman, Babylon the Great, and of the seven-headed, ten-horned Beast that carried her.

It would be going beyond the scope of our present purpose to enter upon a detailed discussion of these last two ABC prophecies and their interpretations. Here we wish to notice only one thing concerning them both, namely, that at the time John received them, the first, second, and

third world empires had come and gone; the fourth, that of Rome, was holding sway. Evidently, therefore, they are to be properly understood only as they are seen to fit into the general outline of the fourth empire—that is to say, are seen to fit into the symbolic forecast of the course and succession of events of the Gospel Age.

Let me refer you here to what Sir Isaac Newton had to say on this important point. All informed people recognize that Sir Isaac Newton, discoverer of the law of gravity, was one of the world's great mathematicians, if not the greatest of them. Yet few know that he was a Bible scholar of the foremost rank. In his exposition of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation this man says:

"The Apocalypse of John is written in the same style and language with the prophecies of Daniel, and hath the same relation to them which they have to one another, So that all of them together make but one complete prophecy."

To summarize then:

The ABC prophecies are seven in number, five in Daniel and two in the Book of Revelation. They constitute a forecast of the long period of 2520 years from Daniel's time to our day. The seven are:

1. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of World Empires symbolized by a great Image, destroyed by a Stone which became a Mountain. (Daniel 2.)
2. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the great Tree being hewn down for seven times, a symbolical expression representing 2520 literal years. (Daniel 4.)
3. The Handwriting on the Wall. (Daniel 5.)
4. The Ram and the He-goat. (Daniel 8.)
5. The Four Wild-Beast Empires, the fourth of which had ten horns, and another little horn. (Daniel 7.)
6. The Vision of the Candlesticks, representing the true Church, with Christ in control (Revelation 1), and
7. The Vision of the Harlot Woman, Babylon the Great, and of the seven-headed, ten-horned Beast that carried her. (Revelation 17)

The last two visions depict the course of the true and the false churches during the period of the fourth world empire, namely, that of Rome, particularly since it became divided into ten kingdoms, represented by the ten toes of the great Image and the ten horns of the fourth Beast—in other words, from the time John wrote the Book of Revelation until today.

As we close this brief review of the seven ABC prophecies, let us not do so without thanking God afresh for the wonderful forecast of his plans which they unfold, for the assurance that his kingdom is destined to replace all these worldly governments, and that it will do so very soon. And let us go forward with renewed determination that the vision shall not have been vouchsafed to us in vain, but that by God's grace we will give all diligence to make our own calling and election sure, and to assist others who have responded to the call, to do the same.

NOTE To THE READER:

In this address I have attempted to present a brief outline of the ABC prophecies of the Bible, with the primary purpose of showing their relationship to each other, and their essential unity. Students will not be satisfied with this bare outline, but will desire more detailed discussion. Upon all such I urge that they obtain copies of the books listed below. These have proved to be veritable keys of Bible knowledge, unlocking treasures hitherto hidden. While this is particularly true of *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, which should be read first, they are all valuable, enabling us, today, to approximate our location on the Stream of Time. The books are:

Charles T. Russell: *The Divine Plan of the Ages*.

R. E. Streeter: *Daniel the Beloved of Jehovah*.

R. E. Streeter: *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (2 vols.).

Other works especially helpful to me in the preparation of this address were those of H. Grattan Guinness. Unfortunately, his luminous expositions are out of print.