

Question:

In Daniel people say the leopard is Media and Persia but in Daniel 8:20 says the ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. verse 21 says the shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king.

If that is so how do you interpret the Bible if things don't stay the same?

Answer:

It is true that in Daniel seven the angel who comes to interpret the vision doesn't name the kingdoms each beast represents. In the story told in Daniel 2 the same four kingdoms are represented, but Daniel does not name them other than to tell Nebuchadnezzar that he was represented in the dream by the image's head of gold.

The changing imagery can be confusing, but when you understand that every vision in Daniel relates to the same march of kingdoms you realize that God was helping us to understand by giving us several sets of symbols. Each communicated something different about the four kingdoms, and each successive vision gets into more detail about the future.

The dream of Daniel two was given to Nebuchadnezzar himself. He didn't understand it, but he understood that he had seen something very important. He also saw in it a chance to rid himself of the false mystics it had been tradition to consult. He reasoned that if they really had the connections to the gods that they claimed, they would be able to tell him the dream before they interpreted it.

Since their religion was false, they couldn't do this, and there was quite a long discussion in which the Chaldeans and astrologers attempted to save their skins. They finally had to admit, however, that the gods "do not dwell among men." Nebuchadnezzar ordered his guards to assassinate every mystic in the nation. You can read the rest of the story in chapter 2.

In this dream the head represented Babylon, the chest and arms (silver) represented Media and Persia, the belly and thighs (brass) represented Greece, the legs (iron) represented Rome, and the feet and toes (iron and baked clay) represented the European nations that arose from the ruins of the Roman Empire.

In Daniel seven the lion is Babylon, the bear represents Medo-Persia, the

leopard represents Greece, and the terrible beast stood for Rome. These were all beasts of prey and represented the negative power of world governments.

In Daniel eight the same territory is covered (except that Babylon is left out). The ram stood for Medo-Persia, the goat for Greece, the prominent horn for Rome, and the little horn represented the church power that would fill the void when Rome fell. A small horn is used for the same purpose in Daniel 7, but the small horn appears on the head of the terrible beast and it uproots three horns before it.

The beasts of Daniel 8 are not beasts of prey, but food animals; animals used as sacrifices in the Hebrew sanctuary. Daniel seven portrays God sitting in judgment on the beasts, Daniel eight mentions the cleansing of the sanctuary (which has an element of judgment to it).

Daniel nine is not another vision, but an explanation of the vision of chapter 8. Daniel prays, and the angel comes to him with a message from God; one it seems to me Daniel didn't understand. But there is one last vision for Daniel, one which takes up the rest of the book.

It too, however tells the same story. It can seem to be most misleading, however, because it seems at the first to start out so literally.

“Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece....”
(Daniel 11:2)

But it goes on to tell of the division of the Grecian empire. It would seem that all the rest of this lengthy narrative, would talk about the actions of these four divisions of Greece. But in a more careful reading you see that multiple persons serve as “king of the North” and “king of the South.” It will eventually become clear that we're speaking of the power of Rome, and the power of Egypt, the North and the South.

I will say this. If you come to understand the king of the North to represent Rome and its successors, where the Christian church comes to dominate, and the king of the South to represent the Arab world, where Islam dominates, the last few verses of chapter 11 seem to accurately describe our present-day condition.

There are other examples in the Bible where more than one symbol is used to represent the same idea. Read Luke 15. Here Jesus tells three parables, all teaching the same basic lesson. The first is about the lost sheep, the second about the lost coin, and the third about the lost (prodigal) son. All three of these express the joy in heaven when a lost soul returns to its God.

Revelation has a similar structure in that it has multiple sets of sevens; seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders (which John was not allowed to write out) and seven bowls of God's wrath.

Daniel is relatively simple to interpret because most of its predictions have come to pass. We can tell what they mean by examining history. Revelation is more difficult because a lot of the things it predicts haven't yet come about. It is impossible to make accurate and detailed predictions about how events in our future will be fulfilled.

The Bible has some difficult passages that keep the most intelligent among us engaged in its study. But it also is simple enough that ordinary and even "retarded" persons can understand its message and receive salvation by committing their lives to Jesus Christ.

No human will ever drain everything there is to know about the Bible. So all of us have to decide to allow some uncertainty about the exact interpretation of some parts of it. It's the only way God can make eternal life a true prize. If there isn't always some new thing to study, some higher knowledge to attain, some loftier wisdom to gain, we would eventually become bored. Let's learn to live with a little uncertainty, its what will keep us engaged in eternal life.

I pray that God will bless you as you continue to study his Word and as you strive to understand it.

Elkanah