

Verse 4 can easily be misinterpreted. At first sight it seems to be a picture of the destruction of the Babylonian empire. The words, "I watched until its wings were torn off," clearly point to a catastrophe, but the remainder of the verse gives a very different impression. To lift up an animal from the earth, make it stand on two feet like a man, and give it a man's heart sounds like a step forward rather than like a catastrophe. The sentence begins with a bad setback, but then pictures a great improvement. There was no national event in the closing days of the Babylonian empire that would fit this scenario. Besides, as the accounts of the four beasts continue, nothing is said about an end of the second or third beast until after the terrible picture of the destruction of the fourth beast. To find an event in the history of the Babylonian empire that corresponds to this account we must look, not at the final days of that empire, but at the career of its greatest ruler, the one who was told at the very beginning of Daniel's prophetic career: "You are that head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). Daniel 4 tells of a remarkable event, when it might truly be said that Nebuchadnezzar's "wings were torn off" as he lost his power and sanity and groveled on the earth for a time, but was then raised up and restored to his former greatness (Dan. 4:9-34; 5:18-21). Thus reference to an event that had already occurred would give Daniel assurance that the rest of the prophecy would also be fulfilled. It also provides further reason to believe that the first animal represents the kingdom ruled over by Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 5 says that the second beast, which was like a bear, was raised up on one side and had three ribs between its teeth, and that it was told to "eat your fill of flesh." The statement about being raised up on one side may have reference to the fact that in the Medo-Persian empire the Persian portion was becoming dominant over that of the Medes. The latter part of the statement, with its picture of increasing aggression, could apply to many widely separated events in world history. Thus it could describe the conquests of the Assyrians and Babylonians; it would fit the conquests of Alexander the Great even better than those of