

Introduction to Daniel 7

Daniel 7

- 1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head [while] on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.
- 2 Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.
- 3 "And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.
- 4 "The first [was] like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it.
- 5 "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and [had] three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'
- 6 "After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.
- 7 "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It [was] different from all the beasts that [were] before it, and it had ten horns.
- 8 "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, [were] eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.
- 9 "I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment [was] white as snow, And the hair of His head [was] like pure wool. His throne [was] a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire;
- 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened.
- 11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame.
- 12 "As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

- 13 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, [One] like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.
- 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion [is] an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom [the one] Which shall not be destroyed.
- 15 "I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within [my] body, and the visions of my head troubled me.
- 16 "I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things:
- 17 'Those great beasts, which are four, [are] four kings [which] arise out of the earth.
- 18 'But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.'
- 19 "Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, [with] its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, [which] devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet;
- 20 "and the ten horns that [were] on its head, and the other [horn] which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance [was] greater than his fellows.
- 21 "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them,
- 22 "until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made [in favor] of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.
- 23 "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all [other] kingdoms, And shall devour the whole earth, Trample it and break it in pieces.
- 24 The ten horns [are] ten kings [Who] shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first [ones], And shall subdue three kings.
- 25 He shall speak [pompous] words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then [the saints] shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time.
- 26 'But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy [it] forever.

27 Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom [is] an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.'

28 "This [is] the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart."

As we come to Daniel 7 we have come to the second major section in the book of Daniel. Remember that chapters 1-6 were historical. They happen in chronological order and tell us of some major events during the lifetime of Daniel. They take place during the time of the Babylonian exile when the Jewish nation has been destroyed and many of its people were forcefully carried away to captivity in Babylon. Daniel himself was one of those Jewish exiles.

The events in chapters 1-6 take place during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, kings of Babylon, and during the time of Darius and Cyrus, kings of the Medo-Persian Empire. In those chapters we saw that the theme of Daniel is the sovereign rule of God. God controls history. The kingdoms of this world are in the hand of God and He does with them as He wills for His purposes. As King Nebuchadnezzar learned: **"the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses,"** (Dan. 4:25); **"For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?""** (Dan. 4:34b-35).

So we saw God in control in promoting faithful Daniel and his friends in chapter 1. We saw God sovereign over the kingdoms of the world in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue in chapter 2. We saw God powerfully rescue the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace in chapter 3. In chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar testifies of God's sovereignty after God humbles him and restores him. In chapter 5 the handwriting on the wall showed Belshazzar God's sovereign power to judge the kingdoms of men. And in chapter 6 we saw the saving power of God when Daniel was miraculously delivered from the lion's den during the reign of Darius the Mede.

Now as we come to the second half of the book of Daniel we will see the same theme, God is sovereign over all. But now, that lesson is given in a different form. The book changes from history to prophecy. In chapters 7-12 we have a series of dreams or visions that Daniel receives from God during the last 20 years of his life. These visions center around the nations and empires of the world, especially as they relate to God's plan for Israel. The vision of Daniel in chapter 7 ties these two halves of the book of Daniel together. It is both a summary of what has been revealed before, especially in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2, and also the outline of future world history with which the last half of Daniel is

primarily concerned. Chapter 7 reveals in broad terms what the future holds from the time of Daniel to the end of time.

Outline of Daniel 7

Chapter 7 divides easily into two major divisions: (1) Daniel's dream—verses 1-14 and (2) its interpretation—verses 15-28.

- I. Daniel's Dream (Dan. 7:1-14)
 - A. The Four Beasts — verses 1-8
 - B. The Ancient of Days — verses 9-12
 - C. The Son of Man — verses 13-14
- II. The Divine Interpretation — (Dan. 7:15-28)
 - A. Daniel's distress — verse 15
 - B. A General Interpretation — verses 16-18
 - C. A Fuller Interpretation — verses 19-27
 - D. Daniel's Response — verse 28

Principles for Interpretation

There are a wide variety of interpretations of Daniel's visions from the second half of this book. Liberal bible scholars normally reject all prophecies and date them forward in time to put them in the category of history and generally end up saying that the writer of Daniel was pious, but mistaken. Many of these liberal scholars reject prophecy because it requires a sovereign God who can and does control and reveal future events. The problem with this view is obvious. It completely contradicts the overall message of the book of Daniel: *God is to be feared and worshipped because He is in sovereign control over everything in heaven and on earth.*

While conservative, biblical scholars believe the prophecies in Daniel are true, there are still differences among them. Bob Deffinbaugh has pointed out that generally, the way we interpret scripture grows out of the premises and presuppositions that we make concerning the text. So before we begin to interpret Daniel's prophecies, I want to lay down some foundational principles on which my exposition of Daniel is based. (I adapted these from Bob Deffinbaugh's sermon, *Daniel's Disturbing Dream*).

(1) The Book of Daniel is *Holy Scripture*, and thus inspired, accurate, and trustworthy.

As I pointed out in our introduction to Daniel, Jesus spoke highly of Daniel, calling him a prophet and indicating that His scheme of prophecy is the same as that laid out by Daniel (see Matthew chapter 24, especially verse 15). Every chapter of Daniel is referred to or quoted in the New Testament; every New Testament writer makes use of Daniel's prophecies.

Remember what 2 Peter says about scripture:

[2Pe 1:20-21 NKJV] **20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke [as they were] moved by the Holy Spirit.**

And Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16,

[2Ti 3:16-17 NKJV] **16 All Scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

This second section of Daniel is partially written in the apocalyptic genre. It gives a message through signs and symbols, a prophetic message of the future through signs and symbols. We've already seen something of the dreams and the visions that Daniel interprets in the first part of the book. And we'll see even more of that now as we enter the second part, the last six chapters.

But that in no way makes Daniel, or other biblical books of this kind (like portions of Ezekiel, Zechariah and Revelation), any less inspired and authoritative.

(2) The prophecies of Daniel must be *understood in light of the other prophecies of Daniel.*

As we will see, Daniel's vision in chapter 7 concerns four earthly kingdoms which will eventually be replaced by God's heavenly kingdom. This is the same outline of the future that we got from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. Each successive chapter will build upon the prophecies of the previous chapters. We cannot take them as stand-alone prophecies. They are all connected to each other and they are connected to the historical section of the book as well.

Verse 1 says, "**In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head [while] on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.**" This verse ties Daniel's prophecy to history. We are dealing with something that really happened, in real space, in real time. This is an historical event. Nebuchadnezzar had been dead for several years. The Babylonian kings that succeeded him were, treacherous and largely ineffective. The Jewish captives were becoming more and more fearful, wondering whether they would ever be restored to their land. And it was in this very moment that God speaks to Daniel in a vision.

The historical contexts of these visions should inform us about their meaning.

(3) These prophecies must be understood in light of the inspired revelation provided by *other portions of Scripture*, and the *cautious use of reliable history.* Other biblical prophecies bear on the prophecies of Daniel. Some prophets who precede Daniel will be important like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Ezekiel who is nearly contemporary with Daniel will help us. Others who come after Daniel, like Zechariah and Malachi bring some clarity to certain things. And the prophecies of Jesus and the apostles, especially the book of Revelation, will build on the prophetic themes of Daniel.

History will help us to understand that some of Daniel's prophecies have been fulfilled and others have yet to be fulfilled.

(4) ***Yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies generally cannot be fully understood until after their fulfillment.*** I believe that at least the final portion of the vision in chapter 7 has not been fulfilled. The specific circumstances of its fulfillment are not given to us in detail. This is the nature of biblical prophecy.

There were many prophecies fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ. The scriptures predicted His genealogy, His place of birth, His home town, His method of teaching, and many things concerning His suffering, death, and resurrection. Yet it was not until after these events took place that it could be more clearly seen how they were the literal fulfillment of the prophecies of scripture. Most Jewish scholars of Jesus' day misunderstood what the prophets said about the Messiah.

I believe the future prophecies have the same nature. We can get a general idea of what will take place. We can certainly get the big picture that God wins. His kingdom will destroy all earthly kingdoms and will be forever and ever. The bottom line is clear. But the details often are obscure until after they are fulfilled.

(5) ***We should take seriously God's interpretation given in the text.*** It is so easy to jump out of the text and start to speculate about current and future events and how they relate to prophecy. We would do well to try to avoid such guess work. We should not spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy trying to fill in the blanks God has left. We should concentrate on what is revealed rather than speculating about what is still concealed. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29:29, "**The secret [things belong] to the LORD our God, but those [things which are] revealed [belong] to us and to our children forever, that [we] may do all the words of this law.**" Our attention should be given to what is clearly and emphatically said. These things were written so that we could obey the word of God.

The Message of the Vision

Before we look at the meaning of the vision, let's summarize what Daniel saw:

One night as Daniel was on his bed, he had a dream and then visions came to him during his dream. He saw the four winds of heaven whipping up the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Then without warning four beasts emerged from the sea, one after another. First came a lion with wings. Then a ferocious bear raised up on one side. Then a leopard with four wings and four heads. Then an unidentified beast more terrible than the first three. The fourth beast had iron claws and ten horns on its head. As Daniel watched, an 11th horn came up from among the ten horns and conquered three of them. Then the "little horn" began to boast of its power and to blaspheme God. At that moment thrones appeared and the Ancient of Days (a term for God) came to judge the world. The little horn and the fourth beast were destroyed and cast into burning flames. Then Daniel saw the Son of Man (a term referring to the Messiah, and so recognized by both

Jewish and Christian expositors) coming in power and glory to set up his kingdom on the earth.

Comparison to Daniel 2

We can make a useful comparison between this dream and the dream King Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel 2. In that dream the king saw a vast statue made of four metals: head of gold, chest of silver, thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet of mixed iron and clay. A stone cut out of a mountain hits the statue at its feet (the iron and clay part), smashing it to bits. Then the stone grew until it filled the whole earth. Daniel explained to the king that the four metals represent four successive world kingdoms or empires—decreasing in value from top to bottom but increasing in strength. Nebuchadnezzar (and the Babylonian empire) was the head of gold. Three other empires would succeed it. We can understand from history that those empires were Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Daniel explained that the feet of iron and clay represented the final form of the fourth kingdom as partially strong and partially weak. The stone that hit the feet represented the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to destroy all manmade kingdoms and to establish His kingdom on the earth.

How do these two dreams relate to one another? In the second half of Daniel 7, an angel tells Daniel that the four beasts represent four kingdoms (Daniel 7:17-18):

17 'Those great beasts, which are four, [are] four kings [which] arise out of the earth.

18 'But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.'

Out of the earth, or the great sea as the vision pictures it, four kingdoms emerge (visually symbolized by the four beasts) one after another. In the Last Days there will be a “fifth kingdom”—the kingdom of God on the earth, which will be established when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and great glory.

I believe it is reasonable to conclude that the four world empires of chapter 2 are identical to those in chapter 7. Why are the same four empires referred to as metals in one dream and beasts in another?

I think the answer is this: The statue of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream shows us the empires of the world as man sees them - beautiful, precious, highly valued, and deserving of our praise. In Daniel 7 we see the same kingdoms as God sees them. They are ferocious beasts, bent on conquest, plunder, destruction, and domination. God sees beyond the glitter of the world to the depraved nature inside the heart of every human ruler. He isn’t fooled by mighty armies, hanging gardens, vast palaces, and sumptuous feasts. He knows that the heart of man is the heart of a beast. It is “desperately wicked” and full of evil.

Daniel 7 also shows us the nature of every kingdom built by man. They are earthly, brutal, destructive, and ultimately temporary. Nothing made by the hands of man lasts forever. One kingdom falls, another rises only to fall and have its place taken by yet another kingdom. The lion rises only to be defeated by the

bear who falls to the leopard who is crushed by the terrible beast. So goes the story of the kingdoms of men.

This is the history of humanity until the end when Jesus Christ finally comes back to earth. Then (and not until then) all earthly kingdoms are finally replaced by the kingdom of God. And that kingdom will last forever.

The message of this prophecy is really quite simple and may be summed up this way: Before the kingdom of God is established on the earth, four earthly kingdoms will rise and fall. These kingdoms go from bad to worse. Arrogant, boastful, and even blasphemous kings will reign over the nations, opposing God and oppressing His saints. All of this is by divine design. During times of oppression, it may appear the saints are being defeated and that God's kingdom is but wishful thinking. When the sin and oppression of evil men reaches a predetermined point, God will remove them and establish His promised eternal kingdom. Then the saints will receive the kingdom which will never end.

What we know from the New Testament is that Jesus will come twice. The first time He came humbly and meekly. As Jesus said, He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 61,

**The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD**

He came to preach the good news, to heal the broken hearted, to release the captives, to proclaim the day of salvation. He came to suffer and die for our sins and to be raised from the dead for our justification. Now all who call on the name of Jesus, trusting in Him as the Lord who died and is resurrected, they will be saved from sin and all its consequences. They will become children of God, heirs of the promise of eternal life and members of the kingdom of heaven.

You can come to that Jesus today. He is able to save all who come to Him in faith.

But the Bible also teaches that Jesus will come again. Continuing in that verse in Isaiah 61 it says not only that the Spirit of the Lord anointed the Messiah for preaching, healing, and setting people free, but also to proclaim, **"the day of vengeance of our God."** That is His second coming. As Daniel shows in his vision, the Lord will destroy His enemies and the kingdoms of men and will reign forever.

A great stone hit the statue in Daniel 2 and smashed it to bits. That Stone is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages, the Stone of Stumbling, and the Rock of Our Salvation. He is the stone the builders rejected. That stone has become the

cornerstone of salvation. And someday, it could be soon, that stone will smash the statue and the kingdoms of the earth will disappear.

Where will you be when the stone hits the statue? If you are on the stone, you will be safe. If you are under the stone, you will be smashed like everyone else. Build your life on the Stone of God's Salvation, the Rock of Ages, the Lord Jesus Christ. Stand on the solid Rock and in the Last Day you will be still be standing when everything else has disappeared.