

SESSION TWENTY-ONE

DANIEL 7

The Vision of Four Beasts

I. INTRODUCTION

Daniel 7 is a pivotal chapter to the book. As the final chapter in the Aramaic section of the book, it wraps up the focus on the Gentile powers and how they unfold in history. Yet it also points forward to the revelation about Israel's future that is highlighted in chapters 8–12 by revealing how Israel (as a nation) will fit into history. Israel will be the target of persecution by the Antichrist (referred to in Dan 7 as the "little horn"), although she will eventually have a significant role in the kingdom given to the "Son of Man."

The chapter is unique with its bizarre characterizations of animal figures. Such depictions, as strange as they may seem to the 20th century reader, did not seem as foreign to the readers of Daniel's day. It was quite common throughout the Middle East to distort animal and human figures as the "winged bull" relief at the right illustrates.

The series of "animals" in Daniel 7, however, are not difficult to understand. They are symbols of great Gentile kingdoms that will rule over Israel, and hence the revelation in Daniel 7 is parallel to that in Daniel 2. However, this vision given to Daniel goes beyond what was revealed in ch 2. The information about Messiah's kingdom is much more explicit, but there is also more elaboration on the 4th kingdom. In

particular, the vision in Daniel 7 reveals that a certain individual will come forth from the 4th Kingdom who will severely persecute Israel.



Winged Bull relief from a 5th century BC palace at Susa.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF DANIEL 7

VISIONS		INTERPRETATIONS	
<i>The Beasts</i>	<i>Judgment Before the Ancient of Days</i>	<i>General Interpretation</i>	<i>Specifics in Regard to the Fourth Beast</i>
7:1-8	7:9-14	7:15-18	7:19-28
7:1-14		7:15-28	

III. THE INITIAL VISIONS (7:1-14)

The animal figures in this section are meant to be understood symbolically. The text itself makes this plain. Daniel 7:17 states,

"These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth."

Also, we note in vs 23 that "the fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom." Hence, each figure represents both the kingdom and the king associated with it.

A. *The First Beast = Babylon (vs 4)*

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream of ch 2, the great image was described as having a head of gold which depicted the Babylonian kingdom. Similarly, the first beast of ch 7 (a lion with wings like an eagle), depicts Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom (a lion representing the king of beasts).¹ The plucking of the wings is meant to depict the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride (ch 4). Eventually, he realized that "it is heaven that rules" and was thus "lifted up from the ground and made to stand" (i.e., his sanity was restored).



B. *The Second Beast = Medo-Persia (vs 5)*

The second beast resembling a bear was meant to depict Medo-Persia. Recall that Daniel 5:28 predicted that Babylon would be replaced by the Medes and the Persians (these two realms united their armies to conquer Babylon).² The figure of a bear may stress the huge appetite that the Persian Empire had for conquest. In the vision, the bear is raised up on one side (one side is exalted over the other), signifying that Persia would dominate over the Medes (compare the ram with two horns in ch 8, with one horn longer than the other). The three ribs in its mouth may depict three crucial conquests of Medo-Persia under the leadership of Cyrus and his son Cambyses: Lydia (western Asia minor) in 546 BC, Babylon in 539 BC, and Egypt in 525 BC. The "bear" was told to *devour much meat*, and historically Medo-Persia became a vast empire through conquest (more so than Babylon).



¹The choice of the lion and eagle for Babylon was quite fitting. Both were biblical symbols elsewhere for Babylon (Jer 4:7 and Ezek 17:2-3,12). In Babylon, the processional way leading from the north to the Ishtar Gate was ornamented with some 120 lions in glazed-brick relief (the lions were symbols of Ishtar).

²Critical scholars view the second beast as Media, and the third as Persia. In Dan 6:8,12,15, however, these two peoples are viewed as one empire (cf. Dan 8:3,20). Furthermore, there was no independent kingdom of Media historically. Media had ceased as an independent empire before Babylon was defeated (Cyrus led the Persians in overcoming the Medes in 550 BC).

C. **The Third Beast = Hellenistic Empire (vs 6)**

A leopard with wings characterizes the third empire to have dominion over Israel. This depicts great swiftness, and is particularly appropriate of Alexander the Great and his rapid conquest of the Persian realm. At the age of twenty, Alexander took the throne of Macedon (Greece), and during the years 334-331 BC he conquered Egypt and Persia, thereby establishing the largest empire that had ever existed until that time.



The beast is said to have had "four heads," symbolizing the division of Alexander's empire following his untimely death. In 323 BC, Alexander died at the age of 33, having conquered the entire civilized world. Following his death, there was a power struggle for control of the empire. After several years of struggle, a plan was worked out to parcel out Alexander's empire among four of his generals:

- 1) Lysimachus: Thrace and Bithynia
- 2) Cassander: Macedonia and Greece
- 3) Seleucus: Syria, Babylonia, and lands to the east
- 4) Ptolemy: Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia Petrea

The latter two generals, Seleucus and Ptolemy, were of particular importance for Israel, because their countries would be engaged in off-and-on fighting over the next couple of centuries with Israel caught in between. In Daniel 11, the Seleucid kings (headquartered in Syria) are referred to as the "kings of the north," and the Ptolemaic kings (headquartered in Egypt) are referred to as the "kings of the south."

D. **The Fourth Beast = Rome (vv 7-8)**

The Hellenistic Empire founded by Alexander eventually crumbled and was conquered by the Romans. In contrast to Alexander, the Romans did not conquer rapidly. However, they were ruthless in crushing others, and hence the text says they "devoured and crushed, and trampled down the remainder" (vs 7). Of all the beasts in this chapter, the fourth is unique (and will receive most of the emphasis). Part of the uniqueness of the 4th beast is its association with the ten horns and the "little horn." These will be further explained in vv 23-26.



IV. THE VISION OF JUDGMENT BEFORE THE ANCIENT OF DAYS (7:9-14)

The image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in ch 2 represented a series of world empires that would be eventually replaced by a kingdom set up by the God of Heaven (i.e., the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ). Since Daniel 7 parallels Daniel 2, it is not surprising that the Gentile powers are once again followed by the messianic kingdom. In ch 7, however, we have even more revelation given about this kingdom. In Daniel 7, the "Ancient of Days" is a reference to God the Father, and the "Son of Man" a reference to God the Son (this is probably the source for one of Jesus' favorite self-designations). After the slaying of the last beast (the final manifestation with the "little horn"), dominion is given to the "Son of Man." Daniel 7:13-14 states,

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

This beautiful depiction of the Son of Man receiving dominion and a kingdom anticipates God the Father granting the millennial kingdom to Jesus Christ in fulfillment of both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.³ The granting of "dominion" was initially given to man in the Garden, though man lost that privilege because of the fall (Gen 3). Yet Jesus Christ will regain dominion for man, and those who are faithful to Him will be allowed to exercise dominion with Him (Heb 2:5-9; 2 Tim 2:12). But when does this take place? Even though Jesus is exalted as Lord and messianic king at His resurrection and glorification, the *kingdom proper* does not take place until after the Second Coming (I am not ruling out a *partial* fulfillment of the kingdom at the 1st Coming). Several reasons could be given for this:

- 1) In the context of Daniel 7, the kingdom is not established until after the "little horn" is slain, and this figure is yet to come in the future according to the book of Revelation.
- 2) Even though Jesus now has *all authority*, the NT specifically states that all things have not yet been made subject to Him (Heb 2:8).
- 3) There are clear statements in the NT that Jesus will take His throne and kingdom after He comes again in glory (e.g., Mt 25:31,34; Lk 21:31).

V. ELABORATION REGARDING THE FOURTH BEAST (7:19-27)

Although the final ruler of the "Fourth Beast" is called the *little horn*, vs 20 says that he "was larger in appearance than its associates." In other words, he is very powerful and influential. Furthermore, the *little horn* was "waging war with the saints and overpowering them" (vs 21). Among other things, this one will be a persecutor of God's people. But who is this *little horn*? In biblical literature, a "horn" is symbolic of power (1 Kgs 22:11; Zech 1:18ff), particularly that of the reigning house (Ps 132:17; Ezek 29:21). So, both the *ten horns* and the *little horn* refer to rulers. Since they are part of the "Fourth Beast," they apparently have some connection to the ancient Roman Empire. However, the book of Revelation puts them in a future context

³ For a defense of this position, see J. Paul Tanner, "Daniel 7:13-27; The Glorious Son of Man," in *The Moody Dictionary of Messianic Prophecy*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, 1127-38 (Chicago: Moody Press, 2019).

associated with the return of Christ. In fact, they are seen warring against the Lord Jesus at the end of the age in Revelation 17:12-14:

"And the ten kings which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings."

Thus, the *little horn* of Daniel 7 is most likely one and the same with *the beast* of Revelation (cf. Rev 13). This is confirmed by the fact that both are associated with the *ten horns*, and that *the beast* of Revelation seems to have power for "time, times, and half a time" as does the *little horn* of Daniel 7 (Dan 7:25; Rev 12:14; 13:5). Furthermore, both are *boastful* (Dan 7:20; Rev 13:5) and both are out to *persecute the saints* of God (Dan 7:21,25; Rev 13:7). Both the *little horn* and *the beast* refer to the Antichrist that will arise in the future Great Tribulation.

This interpretation implies, of course, that there is a *gap of time* between the initial manifestation of the Fourth Beast (the ancient Roman Empire) and its final form with the Antichrist. This, however, is quite plausible:

- 1) Some OT verses refer to both the 1st Coming and 2nd Coming of Christ in one broad sweep, even though separated by nearly 2000 years (e.g., Isa 61:1-2).
- 2) In Daniel 8:9, the "small horn" comes out of one of the four horns. This involves a time lapse between Seleucus in 312-280 BC and Antiochus Epiphanes (the "small horn") in 175-164 BC.
- 3) A time gap is involved in the "Seventy Weeks" prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 between the first 69 weeks and the final 70th week.

This *gap of time*, however, should not be taken to mean that there is little or no association between the Roman Empire of the past and the Antichrist and ten kings of the future. In Daniel 7, all these comprise one image. In fact, Daniel 7:24 specifically points out a connection between the earlier and latter manifestations:

"As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another [i.e., the "little horn"] will arise after them"

Hence, there will be a future confederacy of ten kings (rulers) that emerges from the nations that once comprised the Roman Empire.⁴ This development will take place before the return of Christ. But then the "little horn" (i.e., the Antichrist) will subdue three of them (Dan 7:24), and apparently the remainder of the ten give their power to him as a result (Rev 17:13). This is part of the Antichrist's plot to gain complete dominion over the world, even to the extent of receiving universal worship (Rev 13:8). In this endeavor, however, he will be opposed by "the saints" and will therefore have to resort to persecuting them to carry out his evil schemes. Daniel 7:25 says that he will "wear down the saints of the Highest One."

This world ruler of the end times will be personally backed by Satan himself (Rev 13:2), and in fact is part of Satan's diabolical scheme to turn the world against God and receive worship for himself (Rev 13:4). Satan wants nothing less than this: that those of the world will worship him instead of the true God!

⁴These must be a confederacy of ten *contemporaneous kings* and not a line of successive rulers, because the "little horn" is said to have subdued three of them (vs 24). Furthermore, Rev 17:12-14 specifically says that "they receive authority with the beast for one hour."

Despite his anti-God ambitions, the Antichrist is allowed to have a season of power. Daniel 7:25 says that this is for "time, times and half a time," which is a way of saying three and a half years.⁵ This is probably the last half of Daniel's 70th Week (see notes on Dan 9) during what is known in the NT as the Great Tribulation. The reason that so much attention is given to the 4th Beast and the "little horn" in particular is due to the fact that Jewish people will suffer immensely during his time of power.

The Antichrist is the individual that will arise in the "end times" who will exalt himself, demand worship, seek to have worldwide power and oppose the Living God. The Scriptures use several designations to refer to the Antichrist. Here in Daniel 7 he is called the "little horn" in keeping with the imagery of this chapter. In Revelation, he is called "the beast." Other information about the Antichrist is given in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 where he is designated the "man of lawlessness." The unique thing about the 2 Thessalonians passage is that we are told he will carry out a very defiant act of defiling the Jewish temple: "he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2 Thess 2:4). This cannot be a reference to the temple of Paul's day, because Paul is talking specifically about things that will happen in "the day of the Lord." Hence, we must conclude from Paul's statement that a temple will be rebuilt before the return of the Lord (interestingly, there are concrete plans being made in our day by certain Jews to rebuild the ancient temple).⁶ This defiant act by the Antichrist in the future temple is apparently what the Lord Jesus was referring to in Matthew 24:15-21 as "the abomination of desolation," the event that launches the Great Tribulation:

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; . . . for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall."

According to Daniel 7:25, the Antichrist will "intend to make alterations in times and in law." The text does not indicate what kind of *alterations* these will be, but there will undoubtedly be sweeping changes suitable for a one-world government led by the Antichrist (cf. Rev 13). Nevertheless, his plan will not succeed, for he will be annihilated and destroyed forever (Dan 7:26). Significantly, we note that the messianic kingdom does not begin until after the destruction of the Antichrist. Hence, though the kingdom may have some sort of preliminary fulfillment with the first coming of Christ, the *kingdom proper* follows the Second Coming (since the Antichrist is destroyed at the Second Coming according to Rev 19). Then, the saints will share in the kingdom given to the Son of Man. This, of course, refers to true believers who will share in the millennial kingdom with the Lord Jesus Christ. How ironic: though Jesus calls us to give up everything to follow Him, we will one day possess the greatest kingdom that the world has ever seen . . . a kingdom ruled by a perfectly righteous and loving king.

⁵The word "time" (Aramaic ܛܝܡܐ) can mean a definite period of time such as a year (e.g., Dan 4:16,23,25,32). That this is indeed the case is confirmed by the use of this phrase in the book of Revelation (Rev 12:14) interchangeably with the phrases "1260 days" (12:6) and "42 months" (13:5). Also note how the phrase is used in comparison with the figures 1290 and 1335 in Dan 12:7, 11-12.

⁶Thomas Ice and Randall Price, *Ready to Rebuild: The Imminent Plan to Rebuild the Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1992); and Randall Price, *The Coming Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999).

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

When I was a small boy, I had the privilege to play on one baseball team that went a whole season without losing even one game (but not because of me—I sat on the bench most of the time). We won the championship, and it felt so good to be on the *winning team*. Of course, this means very little in light of all eternity. In Daniel 7:14, however, we are told how the Lord Jesus will head up the greatest winning team ever: "And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve him." The latter part of this verse is the fulfillment of Genesis 12:3—"And in you all the families of the earth might be blessed." But Daniel 7:14 goes on to add, "And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." You and I (as believers in Christ) are destined to be part of this kingdom. Furthermore, there is no way that "our team" is going to be defeated! We are the winning team, and we know from this verse that our God wants "men of every language" (including the Middle East!) to become part of His kingdom. Are you discouraged today? Lift your head up high . . . you are part of the greatest winning team ever!