

Series: The Book of Daniel
Title: "A Vision of Beasts"
Daniel Chapter 7

Introduction

In Chapter 7, Daniel has a dream where God gives him a survey of five world empires.

Have you ever had a dream that seemed so real it was frightening? They call them lucid or vivid dreams. Vivid dreams feel more like real life than a dream.

They're the kind of dream where you wake up able to recall every detail. It sometimes leaves you with an emotional hangover as you try to figure out what happened and why. Daniel has such a dream; only his dream was inspired by God.

Chapter 7 takes us back to the final days of the Babylonian Empire when Belshazzar was the ruler. 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." ([Daniel 7:1 NKJV](#))

Daniel saw this vision after Nebuchadnezzar's reign, right before the Medo-Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire. Daniel chapters 1 through 6 describe the life and times of Daniel. Chapters 7 through 12 describe visions Daniel had. The order of events in Daniel 7 occurred somewhere between Daniel chapters 4 and 5. This first vision is the most comprehensive of the four visions described between Daniel 7 through 12. The other three visions expand on this first vision. Daniel could have given us more detail, but the Holy Spirit only wanted him to write the main facts.

In Verse 2, "Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other." ([Daniel 7:2-3 NKJV](#))

The Great Sea is the Mediterranean Sea. The sea is sometimes used as a picture of a mass of people. The four winds of heaven describe the whole of the earth and heaven encompassing God's work in all directions. The four great beasts came up from the sea of humanity. They were large, ferocious animals, each one distinct from the other.

In Chapter 2, Daniel described to Nebuchadnezzar the Gentile world kingdoms from his day to the second coming of Christ. Nebuchadnezzar sees these world kingdoms from man's viewpoint as a great and beautiful metallic image. But in this Chapter, Daniel sees the same world kingdoms from God's point of view, appearing as ferocious wild beasts. Interestingly, nations are often symbolized by animals.

Verse 4 says, "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." (Daniel 7:4 NKJV)

The first beast is more majestic than each of the following beasts. Lions and eagles dominate their realms. But this beast is distorted. Its wings were plucked off, and it had a human heart. Daniel tells us that these four beasts are kingdoms that would rule over the earth.

The first kingdom was the Babylonian Empire, represented by a lion and an eagle. Jeremiah used both the lion and the eagle as pictures of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 49:19-22), and Babylon's winged lions are on display in the British Museum today.

Verse 5 says, "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!' (Daniel 7:5 NKJV)

The second beast is a ferocious bear. It doesn't have the majesty of the lion or the eagle. It is slower, stronger, and more crushing than a lion - and this bear has a voracious appetite for conquest. When it arises, it devours much flesh. The bear represents the Medo-Persian Empire, which succeeded the Babylonian Empire.

The Persians dominated the partnership between the Medes and the Persians. Some think the three ribs in the bear's mouth are the three great conquests of Persia over Babylon, Egypt, and Lydia. The slow, crushing armies of the Medo-Persian Empire were well known. They simply overwhelmed their opponents with superior size and strength. "The Medes and Persians are compared to a *bear* on account of their *cruelty* and *thirst after blood*, a bear being a most voracious and cruel animal." (Clarke)

Verse 6 says, "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." (Daniel 7:6 NKJV)

The leopard is known for its sudden, unexpected attacks. This leopard is incredibly swift with four wings and cunning, having four heads. The leopard represents the Greek Empire. Alexander the Great quickly conquered the civilized world by the age of 28. After his death, Alexander's empire was divided into four parts. Specifically, the four heads were Casander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy. They were the generals who inherited Alexander's empire after his death.

In verse 7, Daniel sees the fourth beast: a dreadful, horned beast with one conspicuous horn. "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." (Daniel 7:7 NKJV)

The fourth beast is indescribably grotesque in its lust for power and conquest and is so strong it has ten horns. The fourth beast represents the Roman Empire, the largest, strongest, most unified, and enduring of the empires.

Gleason Archer says, "There is an unmistakable correlation between these horns and the ten toes of the image in Chapter 2. The mention of iron in the teeth is similar to the legs and toes of iron in the image." (Archer)

In Verse 8, Daniel says, "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." (Daniel 7:8 NKJV)

Three of the ten horns are replaced by one that dominates them all. Their leader is an intelligent man who is boastful and speaks arrogantly. In verse 9, we catch a glimpse of God as the Ancient of Days.

Daniel says, "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; 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." (Daniel 7:9-10 NKJV)

Daniel says God's throne was a fiery flame picturing the brilliant manifestation of God's majesty. Isaiah 66 also describes God's judgment in terms of fire, "For behold, the LORD will come with fire And with His chariots, like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword The LORD will judge all flesh; And the slain of the LORD shall be many." (Isaiah 66:15-16 NKJV)

Daniel says at the judgment; the books are opened. What books? The books we will be judged by - the Bible, the Book of Life, and the Book of Remembrance. Verse 11 transitions back to the beasts.

"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. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. "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. 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." (Daniel 7:11-14 NKJV)

This passage describes the transition from man's dominion on earth to God's dominion. This happens when the Son of Man comes. It's what we call the Second Coming of Christ. The "little horn" of the fourth beast again speaks pompous words revealing that the final human dictator, whom we commonly call the Antichrist, uses a lot of boastful and blasphemous speech (Revelation 13:5-6). But when Jesus comes to set up His kingdom, the empire of the Antichrist will be completely crushed.

The title, Son of Man, was Jesus' preferred title and is used more than 80 times in the gospels. At the end of time, Christ will come and take dominion, and His reign will be permanent. In verse 15, Daniel reacts to the dream and asks to understand what the dream means.

"I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within *my* body, and the visions of my head troubled me. 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."
(Daniel 7:15-16 NKJV)

Daniel saw all of this in more detail than he described for us. But he didn't really understand it all and was troubled by it. In verse 17, we have the summary of the vision.

'Those great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings *which* arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.' (Daniel 7:17-18 NKJV)

The interpretation of the dream covers the same details as Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2, which also described the rise of four empires, ultimately conquered by the kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar saw the present and future world empires as a stately and noble statue of a man. That is how human rulers see themselves. But God shows Daniel how He sees them: as ferocious and wild animals who devour and conquer people without conscience.

In verse 19, Daniel writes, "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; 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. "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, 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. "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.'" (Daniel 7:19-23 NKJV)

Daniel is especially interested in the fourth, most terrible beast - and especially its conspicuous horn. The fourth beast has great destructive power, a conspicuous horn, and wars against God's people.

Verse 23 gives us an even better understanding. "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. 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. 'But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy *it* forever. 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.' (Daniel 7:24-27 NKJV)

The fourth beast was with the Roman Empire of ancient history. Rome devoured the civilized earth, dominating it for over a thousand years. The ten horns are ten kings who arise from this kingdom.

Modernists like to spiritualize this chapter and the book of Revelation, but I believe these are literal rulers and nations that will arise from the ancient Roman Empire sometime in the near future.

They are the ten toes of Daniel Chapter 2 and the ten horns here in Daniel 7. They are also mentioned in Revelation 13 and 17. They are associated with the rule of this final world ruler. The conspicuous horn is the Antichrist, who arises out of a confederation of ten nations that is in some way a restoration of the old Roman Empire. The Antichrist will persecute the saints of the Most High by applying cruel pressure and harassment that wears down the saints.

"The Bible predicts no peace-loving world ruler for the last days. We can expect nothing more than greedy commercialism and political imperialism under the most beastly and barbaric type of warfare." (Strauss)

This "little horn" will attempt to change time-proven policies and laws to suit his own purposes. But the power of the "little horn" over the saints is limited. It will last for only three-and-one-half years (time and times and half a time). The book of Revelation refers to this as the last half of man's rule on earth, often called the seven years of Tribulation or Daniel's seventieth week.

Then Jesus will come and take away the Antichrist's dominion and Satan's Kingdom and establish His kingdom of peace for all people and nations. In verse 28, Daniel says, "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." (Daniel 7:28 NKJV)

Daniel was convinced this was true. He was so convinced of its truth that his countenance changed as he considered what would happen. You can't deny that this is one incredible vision. What's amazing is that God can and does prophetically reveal His plan and purposes even as they involve the future. And He has plenty of angels to see that His plans are carried out.

So, what do we learn from Daniel's vision in Chapter Seven? Well, first of all, we know that everyone will stand before God in judgment and give an account of their life.

I. God Will Judge All Evil

Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." ([Ecclesiastes 12:14 NKJV](#))

The great white throne judgment is described in Revelation 20:11-15 as the final judgment before unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire. This judgment takes place after the Millennium. After a thousand years of peace, Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire.

The books that are opened contain the records of everyone's deeds, whether they are good or evil. (Revelation 20:12) Everything you have ever said, done, or even thought, and He will judge or reward us accordingly (Psalm 28:4; 62:12; Romans 2:6; Revelation 2:23; 18:6; 22:12).

Another book is also opened, called the "Book of Life" (Revelation 20:12). The Book of Life will determine whether you will inherit eternal life with God or everlasting punishment in the lake of fire. Those who are forgiven in Christ and whose names are written in the "Book of Life" will inherit eternal life. Anyone's name that is not "found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15).

II. Jesus Christ Will Physically Return to Earth

Another truth we see in Chapter 7 is that Jesus Christ will physically return to earth. The study of End Time events is at the forefront of many people's minds because of what we see happening today. Passages like Matthew 24, 1 Timothy 4, and 2 Timothy 3 remind us of things that will be evident before the Lord returns. The Bible often speaks about the return of the Lord Jesus (John 14:1-6; Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

There are two important future events that relate to the Second Coming of Christ. One is what we have come to call the "rapture" of the church. The term "rapture" comes from a Latin word that means "to transport from one place to another." Before the seven-year Tribulation, believers in Jesus will be transported to heaven.

The second part of the Second Coming is commonly called "The Revelation." At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will return with all His saints to rule and reign on the

earth. The Second Coming of Christ includes two significant events; the Rapture and The Revelation of Christ. The rapture is when Christ returns for His church, and we meet Him in the air. The Revelation is when Jesus returns with His saints to rule and reign on the earth.

Matthew 24:30 tells us that "all the tribes of the earth" will see Him at this time. Zechariah 14:4 states that on the day of His return to earth, the Mount of Olives will be split in half, and Christ will defend His people, Israel, against those set on destroying them.

III. The Saints Will Reign With Christ

Finally, the saints will rule and reign with Christ in His Everlasting Kingdom. Revelation 20:6 says, "Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." ([Revelation 20:6 NKJV](#))

Those who are victorious and do the Lord's will to the end will be given authority over the nations. The Bible says those who share in the first resurrection will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Reigning means that we will be given authority over others as part of our reward in heaven. The extent of the authority given to us will depend on our works in obedience to the Lord's commands here on earth. The quantity and quality of our works on earth now determines how much authority we receive to reign in the next life. In Luke 12:48, Jesus says, "**For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.**"

Sin in this life can certainly be forgiven, but your lifestyle can affect your eternal reward and reigning authority. If salvation is a settled issue for you, then focus on maximizing your eternal reward and how you will rule and reign with Christ. The extent of your eternal reward and authority to reign in the next age is, in part, up to you.

Conclusion

The overall theme of the Book of Daniel is God's sovereignty over history. Daniel wrote this book to encourage the Jews who were undergoing persecution and domination by worldly empires due to their disobedience and sinfulness against God. Chapters 7–12 predict the end of Israel's domination by these empires and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. Chapter 7 reintroduces the theme of Chapter 2 of the four world empires Israel would come under. Each empire would be worse than the last until, finally, God sends His Messiah, Jesus Christ, to end Israel's oppression and establish the eternal kingdom.

Beyond the prophetic prediction of the eternal kingdom of God, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, there are many other applications for us as

Christians. There is a judgment we all will face. Jesus, the Son of God, will physically return to the earth, and we will rule and reign with Christ in his eternal kingdom.