

Earthly Kingdoms and the Everlasting Kingdom

Daniel 7:1-14

Overview: Daniel chapters 2 and 7 described five empires (both present and future). King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (2:31-35) parallels Daniel's dream (7:1-14) exactly. But whereas the king dreamed of these empires as a beautiful statue made of glistening metals, Daniel saw them as savage beasts.¹

Daniel's dream in chapter 7 was more detailed. It included specific characteristics of the five empires, and even described the fragmented parts of the third kingdom. Daniel's vision in chapter 8 described two of these same great empires, but revealed even more details about the breakup of the third kingdom. It's interesting to note that the dreams and visions in chapters 7 and following occurred during the reign of Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. This means that Daniel did not relate the events in his book in a strict chronological order. Understanding this causes the reader to look for a theme or emphasis, rather than a succession of stories. As a testimony to the empire of Chaldeans and their many captives, the Most High God revealed the certain future of the world. Daniel 2:48 – 7:48 was written in Aramaic, and especially after Nebuchadnezzar's proclamations, it is likely that many Gentiles studied these prophecies in that international language.

Introduction: Chapter 7 can be broken naturally into two sections: Daniel's dream (7:1-14) and the interpretation of his dream (7:15-28). This message is an introduction, and must create more curiosity than it can satisfy. But in the next few messages, we will work through this entire chapter. Though it was a dream, the prophet noted that he "looked," "beheld" and "saw" detailed parts of this revelation.² The first thing he saw was the winds churning up the great sea. And then four savage beasts emerged from the waters of that sea (v.3). Some have speculated that this sea is the Mediterranean since all the empires eventually reached its shores. But it would be better to think of the sea as the peoples of the world, since 7:17 shows that these beastly kingdoms arise out of the earth.

I. The Earthly Kingdoms, 7:4-8

Consider the description of the four beasts as they emerged from the great sea.

"4 The first *was* like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. **5** And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and *it had* three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. **6** After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also 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, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it *was* diverse from all the beasts that *were* before it; and it had ten horns. **8** I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn *were* eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things." (Daniel 7:4-8)

A. First Savage Beast: The Lion with Eagles' Wings, 7:4

Verse 4 reminds us of the story in Daniel chapter 4 in which King Nebuchadnezzar was reduced to acting like a groveling beast, and then restored. So this first beast represents the Chaldean empire. By comparing this dream with the king's dream in chapter 2, verses 36-38, we confirm that this is the kingdom of the Chaldeans. Their greatest city was Babylon and their greatest king was Nebuchadnezzar. (Babylon is located in modern day Iraq.) Like the lion that is called "the king of the beasts," Nebuchadnezzar was proclaimed to be "a king of kings" by the God of heaven (2:37). His kingdom was like the head of gold in the beautiful statue in Daniel 2:38. The Chaldean empire fell to the Medo-Persians in 539 B.C. But the most important point is this: the great king learned that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men (4:17).

B. Second Savage Beast: The Malformed Bear, 7:5

Verse 5 represented the coming Medo-Persian Empire as a beastly bear. Raised up on one side, this imagery represented that combined kingdom. In the prophet's later vision in 8:3, a ram with two unequal horns represented the Medo-Persians. According to Daniel 2:33 and 39, Nebuchadnezzar saw this kingdom as the silver chest and arms of the beautiful statue. This savage bear had three ribs in its mouth (7:5) and it was commanded to arise and devour much flesh. The three ribs are likely a parallel to the attacks of the Medo-Persian ram in 8:4 and 20 – charging "westward and northward and southward." This ancient Iranian empire was founded by Cyrus the Great. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle and the historian, Herodotus, Cyrus the Persianⁱⁱⁱ was a king under the domain of the larger, mightier nation of Media. But as a result of a revolt among the Medians, Cyrus rose to conquer the realm and unite the kingdoms. The prophet Isaiah had predicted the unlikely rise of this king – by name! – 150 years before (Isaiah 44:28, 45:1). The Medo-Persian Empire fell to Alexander the Great in about 330 B.C. This prophecy gives us yet another indication that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men.

C. Third Savage Beast: The Swift, Winged Leopard, 7:6

The leopard with four wings and four heads represented Greece. This is confirmed by 8:5 where Daniel's later dream pictured Greece as a goat from the West (8:5). King Nebuchadnezzar saw this third kingdom as the belly and thighs made of brass in the beautiful statue. But Daniel saw this empire as savage and beastly. As the leopard is known for its swiftness, Alexander the Great was known for his swift invasions. He conquered most of the civilized world within a decade – from Greece to northwest India. Alexander died in 323 B.C., and his great empire was divided between his four generals: Ptolemy, Seleucus, Philip and Antigonus. Four kings later reigned in the kingdoms carved out by these four generals. Remember the name of that general Seleucus because the Seleucid kingdom will figure prominently in Daniel chapter 8

It's important to remember that Daniel wrote this prophecy in the mid-6th century B.C. This means that these remarkably accurate prophecies predated the invasions of Alexander by more than two-hundred years. This Daniel 7 prophecy, written about 553 B.C., was so accurate that critics insisted that it must have been written later. Since these critics refuse to believe that God inspired these prophecies, they must try to explain them away. But the truth is that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men and appoints over them whomever He chooses.

D. Fourth Savage Beast: The Horrible, Powerful Beast, 7:7-8

The most dreadful beast of all is not identified, but characterized. The other savage beasts (the lion, the bear and the leopard) pale in comparison to this terrible beast. This strong monster with iron teeth would destroy with its strong feet; this brutal creature was very different from the preceding beasts. Historians recognize these as characteristics of the Roman Empire. The Roman soldier's sandal, the caligae (which was more like a boot), was usually made with iron hobnails. And as you know, the Roman armies were legendary for their violence as they stamped out any uprisings against the *Pax Romana* (the Roman peace). The Roman Empire began in 27 B.C.

But this bizarre beast is unusual for other reasons as well. It has ten horns. A great deal of speculation has gone into identifying these ten horns. Nothing in history corresponds to this in the Roman Empire or any attempt to revive the Roman Empire. Forty to fifty years ago, it was common to hear that these horns might represent the European Common Market (established in 1957). As it appeared that ten nations might join together, many pointed to this passage in Daniel. Yet the European Common Market (now absorbed into the European Union) now has twenty-seven (27) member states. Today it is common to hear the speculation that the ten horns represent ten geographic regions of the earth. But it may be that the ten horns (or ten nations) do not appear until just before the Antichrist appears. When you stop to consider the worldwide upheaval brought on by this most recent pandemic, you can see how governments could realign quickly in a crisis. It certainly could be that the coming Rapture of the Church could produce just such a crisis.

In Daniel's vision, a little horn (that was apparently part of the original ten) rooted out three of the original horns. This indicates that this little horn (whom we would identify as the Antichrist) would defeat three nations, or take them over by diplomacy. The horn (which itself is a symbol for power) is characterized as having eyes and the ability to speak great things. Like Hitler, this powerful person will have the ability to sway crowds with his evil rhetoric. We do not yet understand when or how this prophecy will be fulfilled, but we know something more important. We know that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men.

II. The Everlasting Kingdom, 7:9-14

⁹ I beheld till the thrones were cast down [or placed], and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. ¹⁰ A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. ¹¹ I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. ¹² As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. ¹³ I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. ¹⁴ And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

A. The Ancient of Days Enthroned, 7:9-10

The Ancient of Days, the Most High God who has been ruling kingdoms across the centuries, appeared in the vision beginning in Daniel 7:9. To read His description in this passage is to be filled with awe. The monster of 7:7-8 fades into the background when compared with the surpassing vision of God the Father. Verses 9-10 call to mind the angelic wheels in Ezekiel 1. The fire reminds us that our God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29). The thousands who serve Him call to mind the “innumerable company of angels” described in the vision of Heaven in Hebrews 12:22-24).

B. The Ancient of Days Executing Judgment, 7:11-12

In response to the great words that will be spoken by this little horn (the Antichrist), God will destroy the beast and give his body to the burning flame. The coming judgment against the Antichrist is described in Revelation 19:1-20 and 20:10. According to Daniel 7:12, the other kingdoms will continue. (We can see this in the continuation of the countries of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Greece, etc.) In this way, they are unlike other nations which no longer exist (such as the Hittites and Edomites).

C. The Ancient of Days Exalting the Son of Man and His Kingdom, 7:13-14

Who is The Son of Man?

The Lord among the lampstands (the churches) is the Son of Man (Revelation 1:13). Revelation 14:14 pictures the Son of Man upon a cloud, wearing a crown and holding a sharp sickle for harvest. The title “Son of man” puts special emphasis on the humanity of Christ (Psalm 8:4; 144:3, Jeremiah 49:18, Daniel 8:17). This title was used by God to refer to His prophet Ezekiel more than ninety times. But Daniel 7:13-14 demonstrates that this title was also used for God’s Messiah, **“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”**

So it is not surprising to find that Jesus referred to Himself as “the Son of Man” more than eighty times (80x) in the four Gospels. Just before Jesus was tortured and crucified, the high priest at Jerusalem demanded to know of Him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed?” **“And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”** (Mark 14:61-62).

In two occurrences in Revelation, the Son of Man appears as the Lord of all the churches, and as the Lord of harvest who will judge the whole world. Jesus Christ, whose deity is clearly revealed in the Revelation is also a human being, the Son of Man. Made “a little lower than the angels” like human beings, Jesus was made so “for the suffering of death.” He died for sinners like you and me. He rose to prove His victory over death. And now, He is not ashamed to call believers his brothers (Hebrews 2:5-13)! This is such a powerful encouragement to every believer. He understands us. He was tempted in all points just as we are, yet without sinning (Hebrews 4:15). Our brother and fellow human being, the Son of Man, is Jesus Christ.

Psalm 110:1 proclaims, **“The Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”**^{iv} Daniel 7:13-14 describe the coming fulfillment of this psalm. When the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, comes to the Ancient of Days (God the Father) this will be the result: **“And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”**

What should we say to these things? At this time of year, we often hear the strains of Handel’s Messiah: “For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!” What should we call to mind when we hear these beautiful words? “The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men and He appoints over it whomever He will” (Daniel 4:17). And then rejoice when Handel’s Messiah swells with the words, “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! King of kings and Lord of Lords!

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ⁱ Those who do not know the Lord see the world very differently than those who know the Lord. That’s an important reminder in our own times.

ⁱⁱ Note the words indicating observation in 7:4, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 13

ⁱⁱⁱ See Cyrus the Great accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_the_Great

^{iv} See Matthew 22:41-46

