

Daniel 7 - Four Beasts and the Throne of God

January 27, 2012

Good morning! I am Pastor Kurt. I want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting through the Internet. This morning, we continue in our study of the book of Daniel. We are in chapter seven. Take your Bible and turn to Daniel 7. If you didn’t bring a Bible, open a pew Bible to page 744.

While you are turning, I want to prepare you for the second half of this book. It is very different from the first half. I will give you three guidelines that will help us successfully navigate this challenging chapter.

1. **The second half of Daniel is written in the apocalyptic genre.** The apocalyptic genre is similar to a bizarre dream experience. It talks about multi-headed creatures and bizarre animals. These are visions God gave to Daniel that describes the way history will unfold plus they give us glimpses into the throne room of God. As we study this apocalyptic section of Daniel, remember the meaning is more rooted in the pictures than the words. Keep that in mind. I will show you how that works in a few minutes. Daniel 7 to 12 is the biggest collection of apocalyptic material in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the book of Revelation is the big collection of apocalyptic material. Daniel 7-12 and the book of Revelation are connected at the hip. You cannot begin to understand Revelation unless you understand the next six chapters of Daniel.
2. **Daniel 7-12 are not chronological additions to the book.** Daniel received these visions from God earlier in the book. They are just grouped together at

the end of the book. As we study each one, we will find time references telling us when these visions took place during Daniel's life story in chapters one-six.

3. **Daniel 7 parallels Daniel 2.** Daniel 7 is a similar vision to Daniel 2. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue represented the four empires of the world that would rule the world from the time of Daniel until the coming of Christ. Daniel 7 is a vision about these same four world empires, but this time they are described as four bizarre animals instead of four different kinds of metal in a statue. In Daniel 7, much more detail is given to us about the fourth kingdom than is given in Daniel 2. We will look at that those details later this morning.

As we work our way through this complex chapter, we will do it under three headings. They are: Animal kingdoms, the throne room of God and the mysterious fourth beast.

Animal kingdoms

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, "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 out of the sea, different from one another. Daniel 7:1–3 (ESV)

This vision takes place before Daniel 5. In Daniel 5, Belshazzar was ripped from power directly by God. At the time of this vision, Belshazzar just began ruling Babylon. It was a scary time for the people of God. As we learned in Daniel 5, Belshazzar was a fruit cake. Daniel wondered what the future held

for the people of God under Belshazzar, the unstable leader. In this chapter, God explained to him how history would unfold for the people of God.

In his vision, the sea is stirred up by the four winds of heaven. In Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation, a churning sea signifies the human race. What comes up from the human race are four beasts. They represent the next for worldwide empires from the time of Babylon on. I know I haven't yet proven that. Just trust me on this for now. Let me work through this and you will understand why I come to this conclusion. Let's start by looking at the first world-dominating empire.

The lion with eagles' wings --- the Babylonian Empire

The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. Daniel 7:4 (ESV)

The first world empire corresponds to the head of gold from Daniel 2. It is the Babylonian Empire led by Nebuchadnezzar. Interestingly, when I looked into Babylonian archaeology, I learned a winged lion was its national symbol. This is similar to the bald eagle that is the national animal for our country.

This lion had its wings plucked off. It was given the heart of a man. This refers to Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation when he went insane for seven periods of time. Afterward, he turned to the living God and became much more humane in his leadership.



The bear raised up --- the Medo-Persian Empire

And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, "Arise, devour much flesh." Daniel 7:5 (ESV)

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the statue went from a head of gold to a chest and arms of silver, which represented the next world empire. We learned it was the Medes and the Persians that conquered Babylon in Daniel 5. They

became the next worldwide rulers after the Babylonians. They are represented by a bear in Daniel 7.

The bear was raised up on one side. This most



likely represents that the Medes and the Persians were a uniting of two unequal powers. The Persians were greater than the Medes. Over time, they became even more dominant over the Medes.

What about the three ribs in the bears mouth? They mostly likely represent the three empires the Medes and Persians conquered. They conquered the Babylonians, the Egyptians and Lydia. You can see that on the map.

The four-headed, four-winged leopard --- the Greek Empire

After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. Daniel 7:6 (ESV)

Who conquered the Medo-Persian empire? The Greeks and Alexander the Great. This four-headed and four-winged leopard represents Alexander the Great and that empire. It also corresponds to the belly and thighs of bronze in the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream from Daniel 2. Why would God use this weird creature to represent the worldwide Greek kingdom? Remember, the meaning in an apocalyptic dream sequence is found in the pictures. Think with me on how this weird leopard would correspond with Alexander the Great.

At the age of 20, Alexander assumed the kingship of Macedon after the death of his father. His goal was to conquer the world. In only 11 years, he conquered

11,000 miles of territory. Before he died he was in tears because he

couldn't find anything else to conquer. He died at the age of 32. He was truly speedy like a leopard. He flew across the earth, conquering it as if he had wings. After his death, his empire was divided up among his four generals because it



was too large for one person to rule. That corresponds to the four heads of the leopard.

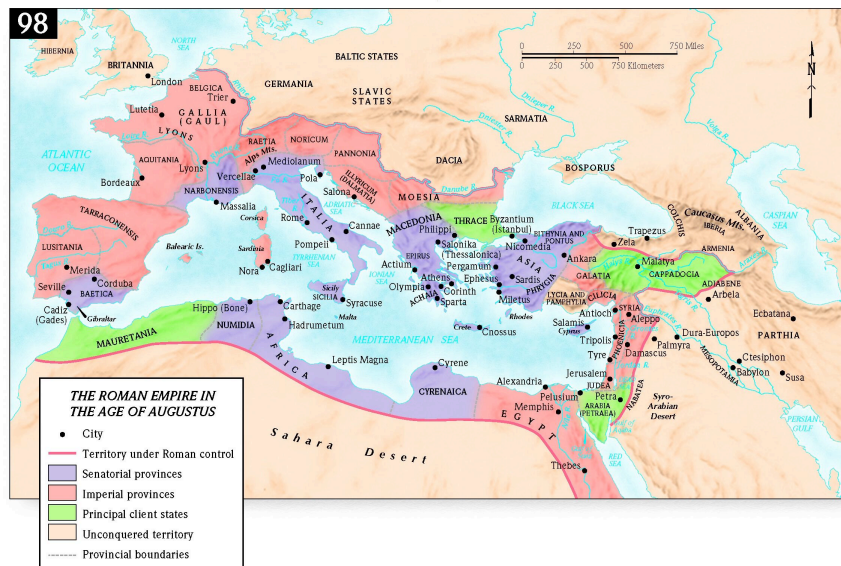
The terrifying metal-mouthed monster --- the Roman Empire

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. Daniel 7:7–8 (ESV)

We will study this fourth metal-mouthed monster in more depth in a few minutes. For now, realize it corresponds to the legs of iron in the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream from Daniel 2. In that statue, the legs of iron represented Rome.

In this beast, the teeth of iron represent Rome.

The Roman Empire was different from those that preceded it. It



lasted a long time. It was also the most powerful of the empires militarily.

Nobody successfully rebelled against Rome. Rome died an internal death. It died on the inside of moral decay and societal rot before it was conquered on the outside.

These four beasts represented the next four worldwide empires until the coming of Christ, just like the four metals in the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream represented the same four empires.

Don't forget this vision took place while Babylon was ruling the world. It took place before the Medo-Persian, the Greek or the Roman Empire were on the world scene. This was prophecy written before the fact, not after the fact.

After painting this picture, God pushed pause on the animal kingdom dream sequence. Like the quick change scenes in a movie, Daniel then found himself in the throne room of God.

The throne room of God

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. Daniel 7:9–10 (ESV)

Who is the Ancient of Days? The Ancient of Days is God the Father. He was around from the beginning. That makes The Ancient of Days an appropriate name. He sees all. He knows all. What was the Ancient of Days doing in this scene? He was not sitting in a La-Z-Boy getting ready to watch football. He took his judgment seat. This was a window into the divine court room.

His clothing and hair were pure white to emphasize his absolute purity. His throne was a consuming fire to emphasize his consuming holiness and judgment. He was the center of attention for all the angelic beings of heaven. If you do the math from the verse, 100 million angels serve him.

In this scene, the Ancient of Days was getting ready to pass judgment.

The books opened. Incidentally, in this passage and in Revelation 17:8 and 20:12, we see God has books. In those books are recordings of all our deeds and the deeds of the nations. The records of those deeds are complete. They are accurate. They are the basis by which he will judge the nations and ourselves apart from Christ.

“I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. Daniel 7:11–12 (ESV)

The judgment of the throne room of God was a thumbs down on the empires that tried to rule the world. That is why they were destroyed. This reminds us that while the rise and fall of nations appears random to us, God is the one behind their rise and fall. The courtroom of heaven is where God gives nations a thumbs down and brings them to an end. This is what we saw in Daniel 5. God gave Belshazzar a thumbs down. The writing on the wall said Belshazzar was weighed in the balances by God and found wanting. God was bringing his kingdom to an end. Sixty minutes later Babylon had fallen.

Since God gives all the empires of the world a thumbs down, the question remains, who will get the right to rule the world since everybody else comes up short? This is exciting.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And 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 one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV)

Who is the son of man? He is a man but he is also a divine being. A regular human being cannot approach the presence of God the Father and live. He comes to God the Father and God the Father gives him the right to be the one who rules the world. God the Father says all peoples, languages and nations will serve him. He will have an everlasting kingdom that, unlike all prior kingdoms, will never be destroyed.

I will give you one guess on the identity of the son of man. It is Jesus! Jesus goes back to this passage and identifies himself as the one who is the son of man in Daniel 7 scores of times. This Daniel 7 passages is referenced 84 times in the New Testament. Most of those time are on the lips of Jesus. Jesus keeps telling people he is the son of man from Daniel 7.

If you were around when we preached the series *Christmas from the Book of Psalms*, you might remember that Psalm 2 is a Psalm written about Jesus. In that Psalm, what does God the Father say to his son?

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. Psalm 2:8 (ESV)

Psalm 2 describes the event we just read about in Daniel 7.

Just before Jesus was taken up in the clouds to return to heaven, what did he say to his disciples?

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28:18 (ESV)

Jesus is the one who is the next rightful ruler of the world. He will eventually be the final ruler of the world for the millennial kingdom and in the New Heavens and Earth.

This is the same message from Daniel 2 where the stone that was cut out, not by human hands, and struck the base of the statue that represented the next four world empires in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. That stone crushed all the empires of the world. The stone, which represented Christ, began to grow and filled the whole earth. This is the same message as Daniel 7.

If you were struggling to believe the four bizarre creatures earlier in the chapter truly represented the next four world empires, the interpretive cue we need is in the next few verses. Look at Daniel 7:17.

These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. Daniel 7:17 (ESV)

Daniel 7:18 has good news that is repeated three times in Daniel 17:18, 21-22 and 27 about what will happen when Christ finally exercises his right to rule this planet and the new creation.

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. Daniel 7:18 (ESV)

Since Jesus will be the rightful ruler of this earth in the end, we have the privilege of reigning and ruling with him when he asserts his authority.

From this point forward, Daniel 7 has new material not found in Daniel 2. It is a detailed description of the fourth beast, the Roman Empire, and how it will unfold to the end of history. You also need to know this is a very hard section. Great Christian scholars differ significantly on this section. Let's do our best to get this section under control.

The fourth beast

Thus he said: "As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole

earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” Daniel 7:23–25 (ESV)

This metal-mouthed monster has 10 horns, which represent 10 kings that arise out of this fourth kingdom. Some scholars believe this is the ancient Roman empire revived as a confederation of 10 kings. This is why some people were concerned that the United Kingdom entered the European Economic Community making the EEC a 10-nation group. This is why some are concerned that Europe now uses a common currency called the euro. They believe this is the beginning of a revived ancient Roman Empire. Others believe these 10 horns represent the 10 rulers of the original Roman Empire.

Who do I think these 10 horns represent? *I do not know.* I am suspect of anybody who gets dogmatic on solving that puzzle. The text doesn't tell us enough details to get too precise. In addition, I don't think the precise identity of the 10 horns is what the text wants us to focus on. The text jumps forward and focuses on an 11th horn. It grows up to be superior than the original 10. It knocks three of the original 10 out of commission.

This little horn appears to rule the world. He is decided anti-God. He focuses his efforts on insulting God and persecuting the followers of God. He goes so far as to try to change the very foundational principles that God has established. This guy may want to make a nine-day work week. A seven-day week is a foundational creation of God. Perhaps this guy won't just make homosexuality an acceptable practice, he may try to make it a mandatory

practice. He will try and destroy all worship of God and get everyone to worship him as if he is God.

Who is this rebellious horn? Ultimately, he is the anti-Christ. He is the one that sets himself up as ruler over the world and is completely against God and God's people. Paul talks about this person.

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 (ESV)

Does anyone know the identity of this individual? It was fun to study this. John Calvin thought the anti-Christ was the pope. From his time of history, I can see why he thought that might be the little horn's identity. Some people in church history thought it was Antiochus Epiphanes. He ruled in the second century B.C., and we will learn much more about him in the weeks to come. He was a vicious persecutor of the Jews that made Hitler look like a house cat by comparison.

My point is there are many people throughout history who fit the profile of the little horn, at least in part. The Bible tells us there will be many people throughout history that will fit the little horn's profile, at least in part.

...as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18 (ESV)

This is saying that Antiochus Epiphanes, Hitler and others who are like the little horn will come across the pages of history. At the end of history, there is the one great final little horn whose name is written in all capital letters. He will make all the other outspoken persecutors of Christ's people and God look like wimps.

Before you panic, there is the good news. When it looks like all hope is lost because the little horn has taken over the world turning society into a godless, sin-sucking, depraved mass of humanity, who comes to the rescue? The heavenly throne room. The little horn will think he successfully rebelled against God. The Ancient of Days will raise his hand and give him a thumbs down from his throne room. That will spell the end of the little horn. Who do you think will ride to the rescue? Jesus!

But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Daniel 7:26–27 (ESV)

This is one intense chapter. While it leaves us with many questions, it also gives us some incredibly encouraging answers about life and how history will wind up in the end.

Applications

1. **God is large and in charge of history.** The earth will be ruled by vast and powerful rulers like the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Ultimately, the world will be ruled by one powerful man, known as the little horn, who is decidedly anti-God. He will seek to destroy the followers of Christ, the very foundations of morality and structures the world is built upon. All it takes to end every world empire is for God the Father to give it a thumbs down. When it looks like life is spinning out of control, we need this window into the heavenly throne room to know God is in charge of history and how it unfolds.

2. **Expect to suffer. Don't be naive about the reality, durability and power**

of evil. It is clear that our planet is just the terrestrial battleground for a divine cosmic battle. Satan is committed to destroying God, his creation and his people. Don't be surprised when he attacks you. We live in a time in history when we don't experience much suffering for our faith. That is not the pattern for most of history. Most Christians suffered brutally. Why? The people in power were decidedly anti-God so they loved to destroy the people of God. Expect to suffer. Behind our earthly life is a cosmic battle. At times in history, miniature versions of the ultimate anti-Christ, have come to power. They made suffering more common for Christians. If you are a child of God, suffering for Christ will be a part of your life. Don't be surprised by it. It may happen when you honor God at work by integrity. It may happen in a bad marriage when you stay faithful to a spouse that has gone astray. The suffering may come socially from your friends in high school when you pray before an athletic event. Expect it.

3. **Jesus was given the right to rule everything forever by God the Father.**

Jesus received the right to rule everything forever from God the Father. There is no plan B. We only await for Jesus to apply the full power of the victory he won on the cross. The heavenly throne room where Jesus was given the right to rule the earth and set up an everlasting kingdom is one of my favorite Old Testament passages. I think it was one of Jesus' favorites because he quoted it as referring to himself over many times! This is a clear

reference to Jesus in the Old Testament, and it screams out his authority over all things.

4. **Fix your eyes on the prize of reigning and ruling forever with Jesus.**

Three times in this chapter in verses 18, 22 and 27 it refers to us reigning and ruling with Christ after he vanquishes all satanic opposition. When we are persecuted, when life is tough and we wonder if it is worth it to keep turning away from the pleasures of sin and to keep delighting in Jesus, remember where we are headed. We will reign and rule with Jesus and under Jesus in this world in the millennial kingdom and in the New Heavens and Earth. *The extent of the eternal reward we enjoy then will correspond to our faithfulness to Christ in the midst of our suffering now.* Fix your eye on the time we will reign and rule with him and under him. Sometimes, it is only when we see the prize at the finish line that we can persevere in running the race of life when it is hard to follow Jesus.



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