

## **Series Daniel**

### **Scripture Daniel chapter 7**

The book of Daniel can be divided into two parts. The first half of the book told stories about Daniel and his three friends and their interactions with two of the important kings of the Babylonian empire. The second half of the book, into we are moving today, describes a series of visions about the future given to Daniel.

The first six chapters are primarily historical narrative. The remaining chapters are of a genre called “apocalyptic” literature. This word “apocalyptic” simply means “revelation.” Normally, the main characteristic of apocalyptic literature is how it communicates through symbolic pictures a sense of judgment and doom. Biblical apocalyptic writing is different. It concerns the end of human history, and there is indeed judgment at that time, but it goes beyond judgment and doom to celebrate the victory of God over the forces of evil.

The emphasis of the stories in the first six chapters was on the sovereignty of God — how, in spite of adverse circumstances affecting His people, God demonstrated His power and control.

The sovereignty of God will be even more evident to us in the second part of the book. We will recognize it in two ways. First of all, the visions given to Daniel were predictive. In them God gave an overview of the history of human rulers and kingdoms between Daniel’s day and the second coming of Messiah. The ability of God to make accurate predictions covering hundreds, even thousands of years, is evidence of His ability to achieve His purposes on earth.

In addition, the sovereignty of God will be demonstrated in His judgment of evil and the establishment of the righteous universal rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. Human leaders and earthly governments, driven by the influences of evil through the centuries, will wreak chaos and injustice on the people of earth, but God assures us that, at the end of the age, He will be triumphant.

One of the obvious benefits of the study of the kingdom of God for the faithful followers of Jesus Christ is the encouragement which is provided. Evil may seem like it has the upper hand, but that is a temporary deception. God, through Scripture, assures us that He will someday defeat the seemingly invulnerable oppressive powers that seemingly are in control of the human race. He will do this because He has announced in advance His purposes and because He is the great God above all earthly powers. We will recognize this in chapter 7.

### **Read Daniel chapter 7**

We are immediately informed in verse 1 that Daniel received the vision in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar. Belshazzar became co-regent with his father in 553 BC. This meant that Daniel was in his late 60s. If you are keeping track of dates, this vision was given 14 years before the episode of the handwriting on the wall and the fall of Babylon. This means that chapter 7 actually occurred before chapters 5 and 6.

There was a reason why Daniel began to receive visions during the time of Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar had been dead for several years, and the kings who followed him were much less effective in maintaining Babylonia as a world empire. For the Jewish exiles, it was a time of rising concern regarding their treatment and their future. Nebuchadnezzar had a favorable opinion of the God of the Jews at the end of his life, but, as we learned from chapter 5, Belshazzar “set himself up against the Lord of heaven” and “did not honor the God who held in his hands the life of the king” (*Daniel 5:23*). This increasingly negative attitude of the Babylonian leaders was a concern to the Jewish exiles. The visions given to Daniel were timed to reassure the exiles that God would always be in control, even if they would be confronted with prejudice and intolerance.

There are several general observations we can make about the information in this chapter. First, there are obvious parallels here with information given to us in chapter 2. Chapter 2 was all about the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. You will remember that he saw an immense statue. The head was of gold, the chest and arms were of silver; the belly and thighs of bronze; and the legs of iron with feet of a mixture of iron and clay. Each part of the statue represented a specific empire, successively, Babylonia, Medo-Persian, Greece, and Rome. In chapter 7 these empires are represented by a lion, a bear, a leopard, and an indescribable terrifying beast.

Chapter 2 presents the earthly empires from a human perspective. There is intrinsic value in each of the materials. However, chapter 7 helps us to understand the view from heaven: where world empires are led by wild beasts who are inclined toward inhumanity and violence and injustice and pride.

In chapter 2 the future of human government was depicted as a deterioration in the quality of the materials. In chapter 7 the empires are depicted as a succession of cruel beasts, each one more cruel and monster-like than its predecessor. These beasts arose out of the “sea,” which in Scripture is symbolic of sin-saturated turbulent humanity (*see Isaiah 57:20; 21:1; 17:12*). The beasts had their origins in chaotic conditions, they had appetites for savagery, destruction, and death, and they became increasingly defiant and boastful against God, up until the final day of judgment.

Daniel’s vision covers the period called by Bible scholars as the “Times of the Gentiles.” We thought about this previously. The “Times of the Gentiles” refers to the domination by Gentile political powers over Israel. The “Times of the Gentiles” began with Nebuchadnezzar, who conquered Judah, eventually destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and took thousands of Jews as captives into Babylonia. The “Times of the Gentiles” continues to exist at the present time, and will not end until the return of Jesus Christ. That is when the political authority of the Gentiles will be destroyed and the Kingdom of God will be established on earth.

Thus we must keep two themes in mind as we study the second half of Daniel: The sovereignty of God exercised in “the times of the Gentiles.”

In chapter 2 the statue in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was destroyed by a rock that was supernaturally “cut out of a mountain. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them,” after which “the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold parts were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff. The wind swept away the chaff without leaving a trace, but the rock ...became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (*Daniel 2:34-35*). That was one picture of the end of “the times of the Gentiles.”

In chapter 7, in the final phase of Daniel's vision, he saw another picture of the end of the age. He saw a heavenly scene in which the "Ancient of Days took his seat" in a great judgment hall. As he looked, he saw two actions associated with this judgment scene: First, there was the slaying of the boastful leader who had arisen from among the horns of the fourth beast, and the casting of his body into the blazing fire, and, secondly, there was the appearance of "one like a Son of Man" who was led into the presence of "the Ancient of Days."

We don't have any confusion about the identity of the "son of man." During His earthly ministry, Jesus referred to Himself as "the Son of Man" more often than any other title (*for examples, Matthew 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, etc.; and in eschatological contexts Matthew 16:27-28, 19:28, 24:30, etc.*). Jesus identified Himself with the person seen by Daniel in verse 13. Not only that, He announced to His followers that He would "sit at the right hand of the Mighty One" (*Matthew 26:64*) and return to earth "in clouds with great power and glory" (*Mark 13:26*).

This personage was presented to "the Ancient of Days" that He might receive "authority, glory, and sovereign power." (*Compare Psalm 2:6-9.*) In contrast to man-ordered empires, His dominion would be an everlasting dominion that would never be destroyed nor pass away."

As a result of the vision, Daniel was "troubled in spirit" and "disturbed." In quick succession, he had been exposed to the ugliness of human depravity and the majesty of God. He had been given a very brief overview of the evil and cruelty which would characterize human history as well as a picture of the triumph of righteousness. He would have understood some aspects of the vision since they were in the dream he had interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar. However, there was new information for which he wanted clarification, and so, in his vision, he approached one of the angels out of the multitude which were standing in the judgment hall.

The first response of the angel was a very general introductory statement: "the four great beasts were four kingdoms that would rise from the earth." The phrase "from the earth" does not contradict the information in verse 3, which stated that the beasts would rise "from the sea." As I said earlier, "the sea" was symbolic of the unsettled, even chaotic, nature of humanity.

The angel gave some new and reassuring information in verse 18: “The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever.” In verse 14, we read that the kingdom was given to “the one like a son of man.” The truth is, those who are in Christ will receive what Christ receives. He will be the king; the saints will be the subjects of the king, and will, therefore, “possess” His kingdom forever. The thought behind the word “possess” is that of “ownership” and “occupancy.” Just think about that for a moment: The saints will own the kingdom. Notice that verses 22 and 27 provide similar information.

What Daniel wanted to know most of all was the meaning of the fourth beast. It resembled no animal known to humanity. It would be more terrifying and cruel. It would crush and devour many victims. It had ten horns on its head, and then an eleventh horn appeared. It was this last horn which was of most concern to Daniel because it would wage war against the saints.

In response, the angel began with some background information. The fourth kingdom would be different than all other kingdoms. It would wreak havoc on the earth, “trampling it down and crushing it.” Next the angel explained the symbolism of the ten horns. They would be ten kings identified with the kingdom of this beast, and then they would be followed by another king who would speak boastfully against the Most High and take action against the people of God.

It would be in the midst of the activities of this over-reaching blasphemous ruler that the court of judgment would convene. The king and his beastly kingdom “will be taken away and completely destroyed,” after which “the sovereignty, power, and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heavens will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High.”

Many details remain unrevealed in this chapter, details which are made known in other portions of Scripture. We will eventually cover all the relevant portions, but for now, I don’t want to go beyond information in the book of Daniel.

One of the important, yet confusing, matters to be sorted out concerns the existence of the Roman empire at the end of the age. History informs us that the last political elements of the Roman empire disappeared in 1453 AD. Yet, Daniel's vision informs us that the fourth beast, representing the kingdom of Rome, would exist until the end of the age. This is in agreement with the interpretation of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The ten toes of the statue and the ten horns of the beast will both be supernaturally destroyed and replaced with the eternal kingdom of "one like the son of man."

If we carefully examine history, we discover that there has never been a "ten-toed" or "ten-horned" stage in the old Roman empire. The fact is that Daniel in both episodes was looking into the very far distant future, even beyond our time. The "toes" and the "horns" represent a future revived Roman empire. Both the dream and the vision leap over this present Church Age in order to focus on conditions at the end of the age.

Remember that Daniel is helping us understand the "times of the Gentiles," the period in which evil will increase and God's people will be more and more persecuted. From the writings of Daniel and other portions of Scripture, we conclude that there will be a time yet future in which the characteristics of the old Roman empire will be restored. Some believers have claimed that the restoration has already begun. In my opinion, we can't as yet claim with certainty that this restoration is already happening. Only believers who live close to the end of the age will be able to identify the trends of the times with great certainty.

We can, however, be alert to the "beast elements" which exist in the political systems of the world. The evidence of evil in the world is increasing. There is more exploitation, injustice, cruelty, and other such practices in the world today than ever before. There is more power at work in the world, such as is found in military weapons and forms of technology, than ever before. There is more religious persecution than ever before. Materialism and the perversion of truth is dominating our culture.

Verse 28 informs us that Daniel was deeply troubled in his thinking, or reflections, of what he had seen. Such momentous events on earth, with kingdoms rising, evil rampant, and persecutions of saints, and, in heaven, with his view of "the Ancient of Days" and "the Son of Man," his dialogue with an angel, and the involvement of the saints in the eternal kingdom, were all mind-boggling — too much to absorb and understand.

I don't know the meaning of the very last phrase. It could mean that Daniel continued to reflect on the vision and its implications, or it could mean that he had no one with whom to share his thoughts. Like Daniel, we need to carefully reflect on what Scripture tells about the reality of life here on earth and the promises of what life will be like with the Son of Man. And, as believers, we must encourage one another all the more as we see the end of the age approaching. (See Hebrews 10:24-25.)