

Daniel 7 • Visions for the Future – Part 1

Introduction

To this point in Daniel he has been interpreting the dreams of others, but now God provides him with unique visions of his own. Basically this is a revelation of what is going to be the Gentile's basic course through world history which leads us into a better understanding of what will happen to Israel in the End Times. It is probably safe to say that it is not possible to fully understand the book of Revelation without first affirming the basic framework laid down in Daniel. It is also worth noting that even nominal Christian/liberal scholars find the details in Daniel so compelling that they do not really dispute their meaning, only whether they were really predicted in advance of their fulfillment. It is interesting that what God reveals here is very plainly understood even by those not claiming the label "Christian" so that pretty much the entire Gentile world is aware of what is going to happen to it based on the light of God's Word.

¹In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it.

[Read v.1]

Q: What does this date reference mean within the overall context of the book of Daniel?

A: These events actually occurred **before** Daniel 5 (the writing on the wall).

Point: This is but one of many books in the Bible which do not strictly adhere to a chronological order. Placing things in sequence definitely aids our understanding in many ways, but we should not discount that the Holy Spirit had a reason to inspire such departures from a sequential timeline. We need to look for the greater lesson behind the way the Holy Spirit chooses to order things in Scripture.

Q: So what might be a reason for placing these events here instead of sequentially before chapter 5?

A: This is basically the halfway point in the book. In the first half through chapter 6 the focus is primarily historical. What is provided beginning in chapter 7 begins a very big change of focus for the rest of Daniel in order to emphasize the prophetic. The first half of Daniel is a teaching that has something to contrast and/or compare in the second half. It also provides a segue from the working of the Gentile nations in the world to the working of Israel in the world.

²Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.

[Read v.2-3]

Q: What does Scripture equate with the symbol of the restless sea?

A: The Gentile nations.

And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

— Revelation 17:15

*Alas, the uproar of many peoples
Who roar like the roaring of the seas,
And the rumbling of nations
Who rush on like the rumbling of mighty waters!*

— Isaiah 17:12

Q: What is the purpose of mentioning "the four winds of heaven"?

A: It reveals that there are spiritual forces which are actually behind the stirring up and agitation of the nations.

Q: And how do we know for sure that the “four great beasts” each represent a different earthly kingdom?

A: It is plainly stated in v.17, “These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth”.

Q: How might the empires being represented as beasts reveal something about God’s judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4?

A: God literally turned Nebuchadnezzar into a beast in the character of those portrayed here.

Q: Why do you suppose these kingdoms are represented by precious metals in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and by ferocious beasts in Daniel’s dream?

A: Nebuchadnezzar’s dream represents man’s view of the nations whereas Daniel’s dream represents God’s view.

*But man in his pomp will not endure;
He is like the beasts that perish.
— Psalm 49:12*

⁴The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

[Read v.4]

Q: Which kingdom is the first beast associated with?

A: This is Babylon, also corresponding to the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2:36-38).

Q: What is significant about Babylon being represented by a winged lion?

A: This is actually a favorite image found repeatedly in the excavated remains of literal Babylon. There are many such figures recovered from Babylon on display in museums throughout the world.

Point: *This is one of the reasons liberal scholars so desperately try to discredit Daniel as having been written in advance of the things it predicts because it so accurately identifies details that inarguably belong to the empires each beast describes.*

Q: Why the reference to first having “the wings of an eagle” and then noting that “its wings were plucked”?

A: It parallels what we know to be the historical record that its initial rise to power was very swift but later was greatly inhibited by internal struggles. During the reigns of its last kings whole provinces would go into revolt against it so that its original aspiration were brought down to earth.

Q: Why is it described as “lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man”?

A: No longer possessing its height of glory (“wings of an eagle”) and having lost the fierceness and aggression of a beast on four legs, it is a picture of becoming more tractable and vulnerable in later years.

Q: And the acquisition of “a human mind”?

A: While today we might think that having “a human mind” makes us the greatest in the animal kingdom, in the ancient cultures of Daniel’s time it is far more likely to represent a weakness, a kind of deterioration from that of a fearless lion to that of a fearful human.

Point: *Babylon was still ruling at this time but at this time the empire was weakening and would fall within only a matter of a few years, giving way to the next beast/empire.*

⁵“And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, ‘Arise, devour much meat!’”

[Read v.5]

Q: Which kingdom is the second beast associated with?

A: The Medo-Persian Empire known not only for its skill and swiftness but particularly for its brute force likened to that of a bear. It corresponds to the silver portion of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

Q: Why is it “raised up on one side”?

A: It mirrors historians’ acknowledgment that the Persian half of the empire was stronger and greater in stature than the Mede half.

Q: What do the three ribs represent?

A: Most likely the three major empires it defeated in its rise to power in Egypt, Babylon, and Lydia although it could refer to three leaders.

Q: And the command to “Arise, devour much meat”?

A: It not only speaks to how dominant they will become, but alludes to the fact that God raises up such instruments to carry out the will of His judgment.

*I have commanded My consecrated ones,
I have even called My mighty warriors,
My proudly exulting ones,
To execute My anger.
— Isaiah 13:3*

Point: *The Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon in 539 BC and was known for its aggressiveness, but it lasted only about 200 years, confirming that whereas Babylon was represented by gold in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Medo-Persia was silver, not quite having the overall impact and luster of its predecessor.*

⁶“After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, 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.”

[Read v.6]

Q: Which kingdom is the third beast associated with?

A: This is Greece led by Alexander the Great who swiftly (by ancient standards) conquered the world and, in the process, the Persians around 331 BC. It corresponds to the bronze part of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

Q: What might be significant about the use of a leopard instead of a lion like that used to represent Babylon?

A: The leopard is smaller, quicker, and probably less ferocious than that of the lion. And being spotted it might mirror the inconsistency of Alexander’s virtues and vices. But it achieves its work with much greater speed.

Q: And having four wings instead of two like Babylon?

A: A tribute to Alexander’s greater swiftness and aggressiveness.

Q: What is the significance of the four heads?

A: It represents the historical fact that upon Alexander’s death his kingdom was split into four parts, each taken over by a former general under Alexander: Macedonia under Antipater, Egypt under Ptolemy,

Syria under Seleucus, and Asia under Antigonus. These would battle back and forth with each other until the eventual rise of the Roman Empire.

⁷“After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

⁸“While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

[Read v.7-8]

Q: Which kingdom is the fourth beast associated with?

A: The Roman Empire corresponding to the legs of iron and the ten toes composed of the mixture of the iron and the clay in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

Q: How does this describe the character of the Roman Empire?

A: It being “*dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong*” describes the way it achieved becoming the largest physical Empire in the world with an appetite which “*devoured*”. Its goal either through outright conquering a nation or subjugating it through negotiation “*crushed and trampled down*” all comers so as to integrate them into Roman culture, language, and beliefs.

Q: What might its “large iron teeth” represent?

A: The various rulers for which it became so historically famous.

Q: What might be both ironic and telling about the way John describes this particular beast in Revelation?

A: He attributes to this beast characteristics belonging to each of the beasts/empires that came before it.

And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

— Revelation 13:2

Q: How do we know that the ten horns represent ten rulers/kingdoms?

A: Because it plainly states so in Daniel 7:24. This also corresponds to the ten toes in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and is affirmed yet again by John.

“The ten horns 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.

— Revelation 17:12

Q: What does the dominant, little horn represent?

A: The rise of the Antichrist as the world ruler.

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

— 2 Thessalonians 2:8

Q: What is different when it comes to this little horn when compared to what we know about the historical fulfillment of the other beasts?

A: Whereas all the beasts have literal, historical fulfillments, the rise of the little horn (the Antichrist) has never been historically fulfilled and thus speaks of something yet to come. It is proof that the first historical fulfillment of the literal Roman Empire is actually speaking to a final,

literal fulfillment of a final kingdom to come in the character of Rome through which the Antichrist will arise and reign.

Q: What might be significant about its having eyes and a boastful mouth?

A: It is something new and different from previous beasts in that it is not merely powerful but exceedingly cunning and clever. It seeks to elevate itself at the same time attempting to denigrate the One True God.

There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.

— Revelation 13:5

⁹“I kept looking

Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His vesture was like white snow
And the hair of His head like pure
wool.

His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.

¹⁰A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him;
Thousands upon thousands were
attending Him,
And myriads upon myriads were
standing before Him;
The court sat,
And the books were opened.

[Read v.9-10]

Q: What is the greater event that this is speaking to?

A: The references to thrones, fire, and especially that “*the books were opened*” all provide a picture of final judgment upon the nations.

Point: *At the outset it was revealed to Daniel that spiritual forces were at work among the nations, expressed by the fact that “the four winds of the heaven were stirring up the great sea”. Here we see that while the kingdoms of the earth have been going about their business conquering and flexing their authority, in reality the kingdom of heaven has been organizing in preparation to conquer and exert its authority over them all.*

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

— Revelation 20:4

¹¹“Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.

¹²As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

[Read v.11-12]

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

— Revelation 13:1–2

Q: What is striking about the sequence of the beasts as seen by John in Revelation versus Daniel?

A: The sequence is reversed. Daniel sees them as one looking into the future whereas John sees them as one looking into the past. Both see the ultimate, same result.

Q: How is the fate of the final kingdom described in both Daniel and Revelation?

A: As coming to the same end, of being judged and destroyed in the same character as the Antichrist himself.

“For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

— Revelation 18:8

Q: What is meant by “an extension of life” for the first three empires?

A: Unlike the final and sudden destruction of the last kingdom, these previous empires continued to exist, fading away by degrees. They experienced judgment but not the kind of final judgment associated with being thrown into the Lake of Fire.

¹³“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.

¹⁴And 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.

[Read v.13-14]

Q: To whom is ultimate dominion and authority given over all the kingdoms?

A: To Christ. It reflects what Nebuchadnezzar was told in the course of his own dream.

“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

— Daniel 2:44

Note: There is an interesting assertion in Jewish extra-biblical commentaries on this passage where they juxtapose the Messiah’s coming in Daniel “with the clouds of heaven” against Zechariah’s declaration, “Behold, your king is coming to you...humble, and mounted on a donkey”. (Zech. 9:9) They make the claim that if the Israelites are worthy the Messiah will come on the clouds, but if they are not worthy He will come riding on a donkey. In certain aspects we can see this is right in terms of their unworthiness at His First Coming, but we can also see that one of the reasons they missed Him is their misinterpretation of Scripture due to their desire to receive Messiah in all the glory of His Second Coming before allowing Him to accomplish the work of the cross during His First Coming. To this day there is the Jewish notion that the Messiah did not come as Daniel predicted because they were not worthy.

Q: So who is the “Ancient of Days”?

A: God the Father before whom Christ presents Himself.

And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

— Revelation 5:7

Q: How does what is taking place here provide an extreme contrast to all the beasts and kingdoms described previously?

A: Whereas they attempted to conquer and rule the whole world as they knew it but were only successful to a certain degree, to Christ will be given everything and everyone in its entirety. Whereas they were temporary, His will be everlasting. Just as described in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, everything will give way to the kingdom of Christ.

“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

— Daniel 2:44

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

— Revelation 11:15

¹⁵“As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ¹⁶I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷“These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. ¹⁸But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.”

[Read v.15-18]

Q: What does this tell us about life on earth in general?

A: The earth is the object of a struggle with successive efforts to control and rule it all. But in the end it is not just that Christ will win it all, but that it is passed on to His holy ones – “*the saints*” eternally.

¹⁹“Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, ²⁰and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. ²¹I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²²until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.

[Read v.19-27]

Q: What seems to be the particular characteristic that made this beast stand out? Why was it feared more than the others?

A: This beast/kingdom is specifically mentioned as “*waging war with the saints and overpowering them*”. It specifically targets God’s people and goes out of its way to be a ferocious enemy to them.

Point: *Thus we see that the original Rome which aggressively persecuted both Jews and Christians has been replayed over and over again in the Roman Church who has aggressively persecuted both Jews and true Christians, and how they ultimately teach something about the final kingdom of the Antichrist to come.*

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child...So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

— Revelation 12:3–4, 17

Q: What does the final kingdom of the Antichrist achieve which distinguishes it from the others?

A: It completely crushes and absorbs all the other kingdoms of the earth.

Q: But what is the final result?

A: The Antichrist is only successful temporarily; God renders Final Judgment “*in favor of the saints*” who take ultimate and final “*possession of the kingdom*”. (v.22)

Point: *What Satan and his earthly kingdoms attempt to own and control is ultimately accomplished through Christ alone.*

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dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.’

²⁸“At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

Q: What is the significance of the ten kings?

A: They represent earthly rulers who will either willingly give their allegiance and loyalty to the Antichrist or, in the case of three of them, be conquered by him to be brought into submission.

“The ten horns 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.

— Revelation 17:12–13

Q: What are some of the basic character traits learned here concerning the Antichrist?

1. “He will speak out against the Most High”. (v.25)
2. “He will...wear down the saints of the Highest One”. (v.25)
3. “He will...intend to make alterations in times and in law”. (v.25)
4. “They [alterations in times and law] will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time” (v.25)
5. “His dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever”. (v.26)

Q: What does the Messiah accomplish which everyone else, the Antichrist included, failed to achieve?

A: “All the dominions will serve and obey Him”. (v.27)

[Read v.28]

Q: What are some of the applications of Daniel’s reaction to the vision which might be relevant to us?

1. True messengers of God are extremely empathetic as to what will happen to the people for which the message is intended. Although things turn out good for the saints in the end, Daniel is disturbed by what transpires leading up to it.
2. True messengers of God don’t rush out to convey a message they themselves don’t fully comprehend.
3. As with most personal encounters with God recorded in Scripture, the experience is humbling and life-changing.
4. Others?

In Summary

Biblical prophecy is not so much about predicting specific dates and much more to do with pattern and fulfillment. What began as literal, historical kingdoms are replayed throughout history until their ultimate, final fulfillment. Each iteration teaches something about the final one to come. It follows Jesus’ teaching that the End Times are like birth pangs where events come with greater force and frequency the closer they come to their final fulfillment.

But ultimately one is faced with an issue of faith in these things. If God was so faithful to fulfill every detail as predicted, how could we doubt that everything yet to come will not come true exactly as specified?

Finally, it is advised that we take these things only so far as Scripture takes them. For instance, a very famous book on the End Times published in the late 60’s asserted that the ten toes and the ten horns would be fulfilled as the European Union when they finally achieved ten members. Since then however, the EU has incorporated 27 member countries which makes it difficult to sustain the original assertion. The point is that we are provided the plain, basic structure and that is exactly what we should be continually looking for God to plainly fulfill.