

# Daniel 7: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Daniel chapter 7. 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.

The first was like a lion and had eagle's 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.

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.

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.

[ 0 : 5 8 ] 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. 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 thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking.

[ 2 : 0 1 ] 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.

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. As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me.

I approached one of those who stood there, and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made known to me the interpretation of the things. These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet.

[ 3 : 17 ] And about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up, and before which three of them fell. The horn that had eyes and a mouth, that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions.

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

Thus he said, Here is the end of the matter.

As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my colour changed, but I kept the matter in my heart. Daniel chapter 7 is a transitional chapter in the book.

Chapter 6 was the last of the narrative chapters of the book, and chapter 7 begins the section of the book containing Daniel's visions and prophecies. This connects the chapter with the chapters that conclude the book.

[ 5 : 04 ] Daniel chapter 7 is the last of the Aramaic chapters of the book, which began in chapter 2. The Aramaic chapters have a book-ended or chiasmic structure. Chapter 2 corresponds with chapter 7, 3 with 6, and 4 with 5.

In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had his dream of the image, with a golden head, silver chest and arms, bronze waist and thighs, iron legs and feet and toes with iron and clay admixed.

These four kingdoms in succession correspond with the four beasts in chapter 7, which describe the sequence in different but complementary symbolic imagery. The correspondences between these two visions aren't merely at the level of four kingdoms in succession, but also relate to more particular details of those kingdoms that we are given.

There is, for instance, a correspondence between ten toes on the statue and ten horns of the fourth beast in chapter 7. This chapter also breaks with the chronological sequence of the narrative chapters that preceded it, even though the literary structure of the book that we have just seen shows that its place in the wider text is not arbitrary, but is carefully considered.

Daniel receives this vision at the beginning of the reign of Belshazzar, some time before the events described in the preceding two chapters. At the time of Belshazzar's feast, in chapter 5, for instance, Daniel already had this vision.

[ 6 : 21 ] When considering such a vision, we should appreciate that it is not merely about random world historical events in the ancient Near East. It relates to the broader covenantal purpose of the Lord playing out in history.

The beasts of the nations are part of the picture, but they are not at the centre. If we treat them as if they were at the centre of the picture, we will likely struggle to appreciate the momentous character of what is taking place.

The events of this vision are seen from a heavenly vantage point. This is where the key event of the vision takes place, and that is also the place from which the significance of the earthly events can be perceived.

It is the realm from which they are orchestrated. Were one merely viewing the events from an earthly perspective, one wouldn't perceive the significance of what was occurring. When considering this vision, we should bear in mind the relationship between earthly empires and powers and the heavens.

The Lord entrusted the government of the nations to heavenly agencies. We've already encountered heavenly watchers in chapter 4. Further heavenly rulers appear in the chapters that follow. Persia, for instance, has an angelic prince.

[ 7 : 25 ] The empire is not merely an earthly and human entity, but also plays its part in a heavenly drama. The crucial changes occur in the heavens, but have far-reaching ramifications upon the earth.

As in the case of the four kingdoms of chapter 2, scholars differ over the identification of the kingdoms in this chapter. Many scholars, overwhelmingly but not exclusively liberal scholars, support a 2nd century BC dating for the book.

They identify the kingdoms with Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. The little horn in this reading is identified as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Understood this way, the chapter presents itself on the surface as 6th century BC prophetic literature, but it is really 2nd century BC pseudepigraphical literature, not really written by Daniel and not being predictive prophecy at all.

To represent this position fairly, we should recognise that it need not require that we present the text as perpetuating an intentional falsehood. There were pseudepigraphical works, and such works can be understood in terms of genre conventions.

Problems would arise, of course, in contexts where such genre conventions were not recognised, and the works were presumed to be actual historical accounts, rather than fictional stories. This said, however, we should be clear that for many such scholars, a motivation for holding their position is their denial of the possibility of predictive prophecy.

[ 8 : 49 ] Evangelical and conservative scholars, by contrast, have generally identified, rightly I believe, the beasts as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, at least in some form.

Ernest Lucas argues that the four beasts exhibit the influence of Hosea chapter 13 verses 7 to 8, where the three animals to which the first three beasts are compared are mentioned, along with a fourth wild beast that might correspond with the monstrous creature that follows them.

So I am to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way, I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

In this list of the animals, the leopard and the bear are in a different order from Daniel chapter 7. In this list of the animals, Lucas suggests that the order that they appear in in Daniel might have something to do with their hierarchical ordering, relating to the gold, silver, bronze and iron of chapter 2, a bear is second to a lion.

The vision is received in the first year of Belshazzar, likely around 553 BC, by which time the realities perceived in the vision had already been in motion for some time.

[ 9 : 59 ] The imagery of the vision is cosmic and creational, while some commentators dispute the presence of such imagery. Many hearers have recognised imagery from Genesis chapter 1 in this vision.

As at the beginning of the creation story, the winds of heaven are moving over the face of the waters. Just as the land was brought up out of the water, so great beasts will be raised up out of the sea.

The beasts are connected with various animals, and the vision concludes with the Son of Man receiving the dominion over them. Four strange and remarkable beasts with peculiar properties arise from the sea in succession.

Each are described by Daniel, along with the transformations that some of them undergo. The first beast is compared to a lion with eagle's wings. A lion with eagle's wings should remind us of the living creatures, or the cherubim, of Ezekiel's throne chariot vision, in chapters 1 and 10 of his book.

Given the presence of the Lord's throne chariot in this chapter, we should be alert to connections between this vision of Daniel's and the vision of Ezekiel. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the corresponding chapter, he was identified with the head of gold.

[ 11 : 06 ] Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, but the head of gold is also the kingdom that arises from him. The same thing is the case with this first beast, within which we can see both Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire.

The lion, more generally, is an image of the grandeur of Babylon, related to the head of gold in chapter 2. In chapter 6, the lion's den represented the period of Babylonian exile.

In scripture, Babylon is compared both to a lion and an eagle. For instance, in Jeremiah chapter 4 verse 7, A lion has gone out from his thicket. A destroyer of nations has set out.

He has gone out from his place to make your land a waste. Your cities will be ruins without inhabitant. And in Ezekiel chapter 17 verses 2 to 3, Babylon, however, was humbled in the person of its king Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4.

Chapter 7 speaks of the eagle's wings being removed. We should think back to chapter 4 verse 33. Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hair grew as long as eagle's feathers, and his nails were like bird's claws.

[ 12 : 30 ] After his humbling, however, Nebuchadnezzar was raised up once more, restored to power. The restored Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon had undergone a transformation. The guardian beast now was humanized, standing on its two feet and having the mind of a man.

In the reduction of Nebuchadnezzar to his bestial form, he and his kingdom were being unmasked in their true character. In the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar, he was being elevated into something greater, his receiving the heart of a man, corresponding with his recognition of the sovereignty of the lord, and becoming a knowing servant of him.

The second beast, the bear-like monster, is the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. Its twofold character is seen in its two sides, one raised up above the other. In chapter 8, the empire of Medo-Persia will be represented as a ram with two horns, a single beast with two conspicuous parts.

The raising up of one of the sides of the Medo-Persian beast occurs as Cyrus becomes its king. Paul Tanner suggests that the connection between the Medo-Persian kingdom and the bear might have to do with its appetite, seen both in the three ribs between its teeth and in the instruction given to it to devour much flesh.

The Medo-Persian and later Achaemenid Empire was the largest empire to that point in history, commanding a massive military force. Tanner speculates that the three ribs in its mouth represent key conquests that it made earlier on, suggesting that these could represent Lydia, Babylon and Egypt.

[ 14 : 00 ] James Bajon, taking a similar line of interpretation, identifies the ribs as the Phrygians, Cappadocians and Arabians, who were conquered by Medo-Persia and assimilated into their force prior to attacking Babylon.

The Persian Empire was succeeded by the Empire of Greece under Alexander the Great. Alexander came to the throne of Macedon at the age of 20, and by 33 he was dead. However, within little over 10 years he conquered the entirety of the Persian Empire, which had long troubled the Greeks.

He spread the power of Greece across the known world, even extending into India. The pace of the leopard, assisted by its four wings, represents the speed of Greece's rise to dominance.

Alexander's Greek Empire split immediately after his death into four separate and often rival kingdoms under four of his generals. One ruled over much of Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey, another over Macedonia and Greece, a third over Egypt, Palestine and other surrounding areas, and a fourth over Syria, Babylonia and other eastern lands.

James Jordan and Peter Lighthouse dispute this identification of the four heads, arguing instead that they refer to four successive phases of the Greek Empire. In Revelation chapter 17 verses 9 to 14, the description of the seven heads of the beast as kings or kingdoms, five of which have fallen, one that currently is, and one that is yet to come and will remain only a short time, might give weight to the idea of the heads as standing for successive phases.

[ 15 : 31 ] According to Jordan and Lighthouse's reading, the Roman Empire in its earlier stage is a mutation and continuation of Hellenistic rule, which will later transmogrify into a terrifying new entity of its own.

The fourth beast that arises is different from those preceding it, being arrestingly monstrous and not being compared to any specific animal. It has features reminiscent of those of the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

It has iron teeth corresponding with the iron legs, and ten horns corresponding with the ten toes. It is also distinguished by its strength, much like iron is. It has powerful feet that can trample down other forces.

In Revelation chapter 13 verses 1 to 8, the sea beast that is described clearly corresponds to this fourth beast. And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns, and blasphemous names on its heads.

And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power, and his throne in great authority.

[ 16 : 38 ] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marvelled as they followed the beast. And they worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?

And the beast was given a mouth, uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints, and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

The sea beast in Revelation is a composite of the beasts of Daniel 7. It has the ten horns of the fourth beast. It has seven heads, corresponding to the total heads of the four beasts.

It also has distinguishing characteristics of each of the four beasts. It is most essentially like the speedy leopard. It is an empire founded upon a Hellenistic basis.

[ 17 : 49 ] It has feet like the Medo-Persian bear, and a mouth like that of the Babylonian lion. The sea beast of Revelation is the final form of the beasts, a composite of them all.

And in this respect, it is also a reflection of the satanic red dragon of Revelation chapter 12, which has seven heads and ten horns. When it reaches maturity, it mutates into the form of the terrifying satanic power behind it.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of chapter 2 showed the unity and continuity of the four successive kingdoms in a single statue. They are not merely detached entities. The vision of the beasts in chapter 7 does not highlight the same unity.

However, viewed in terms of the beast of Revelation, we can see that the final beast is a hybrid of those that preceded it. Each empire that arises maintains and develops features of its predecessors, not merely being a completely new entity.

On a very small level within the book of Daniel, we can see the way that Daniel serves as a high official both in the Babylonian and the Medo-Persian administrations. Such continuity also functions culturally.

[ 18 : 55 ] For instance, the Roman Empire preserved and continued much of the culture of the Greeks. The fourth beast is generally identified with Rome by conservative scholars. At least, that is generally seen as its most immediate identification.

Many regard the fulfilment of the prophecies of chapters 7 and 2, however, as still lying in the future. This is in part because they find it difficult to believe that the prophecies of the destruction of the image and the elevation of the saints to the possession of the kingdom have already been fulfilled.

The fourth kingdom seemingly has at least three stages. There's the initial stage with the arising of the kingdom itself. In its second stage, ten horns arise, as we see in verse 24.

And in its final stage, the little horn arises, taking the place of three other horns. Interpreting the ten horns is difficult. John Calvin argues that the ten merely signifies many and that the horns are the rulers over provinces who enjoyed considerable power in the Roman Empire.

The mutation that the beast underwent was the shift from Republican to Imperial Rome under the Caesars, who, for Calvin, are to be connected with the little horn. Jordan and Lighthouse argues that the ten horns are successive emperors from Julius Caesar on.

[ 20 : 09 ] These emperors exercise a cumulative power over time. Especially when interpreting the great image of chapter 2, we should recognise that sequential realities can be represented in a single visual snapshot, even though the realities so represented later undergo changes.

This is less obvious in the vision of chapter 7, but still the case. Ten horns need not represent an enduring state during a given period of time, but might be a succession of related entities.

In other words, we might be dealing with ten successive, yet related rulers, rather than ten concurrent rulers. Jordan and Lighthouse stress that the prophecy focuses not upon general shifts in Imperial dominance in the ancient world, but upon those shifts as they pertain to the people of God.

It may seem as though the great centre of weighty events on earth is Rome, but the earthly centre is really the people of God, generally represented in Jerusalem, and, above them, Heaven itself.

Consequently, features of Imperial powers that might seem relatively minor and insignificant from an earthly perspective take on great significance. Jordan argues that the little horn is the power of the Herods.

[ 21 : 20 ] The Herods exert the power of the great fourth beast within the land. In the book of Revelation, the dragon gives authority to the sea beast, who in turn is served by a land beast. The Herods exercise the power of three emperors, Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius, over the Jews.

They don't destroy the other three horns. Rather, as Jordan writes, a stump is not something uprooted, but something from which an offshoot appears. In Ezekiel chapter 1, Ezekiel saw a vision of the divine throne chariot.

Daniel sees something similar here with the arrival of the Ancient of Days. Daniel is seeing these beasts from the perspective of Heaven and the judgments of the Heavenly Court. There is about to be a radical transformation in the heavens, which will change matters on earth.

The old covenant order was placed under the rule of angels. Satan enjoyed authority in the heavenly realm, and the people of God had not yet been raised up to sit in heavenly places.

They were bound in the realm of the grave at their deaths. Once again, this vision relates to events that we see in the book of Revelation that specifically concerns the death, the resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, and the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

[ 22 : 30 ] As we see later on in figures such as the Prince of Persia, an angelic figure that stands for the Persian Empire, these earthly beast empires represent heavenly powers.

While empires may continue to rise and fall on earth, with the ascension of Christ and his sitting at God's right hand, the great powers of the heavens will be shaken, old powers will be removed, Satan, the great dragon of old, will be cast down to earth, and his angels with him.

We should recognize, for instance, the importance of these empires as religious bodies. They were not just human polities, but they were the kingdoms of spiritual entities, commanding the fear, worship, and service of millions of people.

In verse 13 and 14, a new figure comes to receive the kingdom, to receive the realms that formerly belonged to the beasts. Continuing the theme that pervades the book of Daniel, the enduring character of God's kingdom, this figure, the one like the Son of Man, receives a dominion that will not be destroyed.

This passage is one of the most important for understanding New Testament eschatology. Already prior to the time of the New Testament, the figure of the Son of Man in Daniel chapter 7 was being read messianically.

[ 23 : 39 ] Christ presents himself as the Son of Man, the one who receives the kingdom. In Matthew chapter 26, verse 64, at his trial before the high priest, Jesus declares, But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

In the Olivet Discourse, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the events surrounding it is seen as proof that Christ is seated at God's right hand. The ascension of Christ and the demonstration that he is now seated at God's right hand is proof that the events of Daniel chapter 7 have occurred.

Likewise, Daniel chapter 7 lies behind much of the prophecy of Revelation. Daniel is deeply troubled by the vision and seeks understanding of its proper interpretation. In summary, the meaning of the vision is given in verses 17 and 18.

Daniel is especially troubled by the fourth beast and the figure of the little horn that arises within it. The little horn is distinguished by its pride and its blasphemy. It is also marked out by its focused and indeed successful persecution of the saints.

The little horn in the interpretation that is given to Daniel, perhaps by Gabriel, may perhaps relate to the figure of the land beast in Revelation chapter 13, a Jewish agency of persecution operating with power granted by and in the name of the sea beast of Rome.

[ 24 : 57 ] The reign of the beast will finally be brought to an end as the son of man inherits the kingdom. The figure like the son of man is not just an individual figure. We see this in verse 22. The judgment is given not just for this individual figure, but also for the saints.

They are the ones that will possess the kingdom. The old beastly powers are dethroned and Christ and his people take their place. After the ascension of Christ, the beasts and their order is not immediately destroyed.

Rather, as we see in the book of Revelation, it continues for a time and the little horn and the monstrous form of the final beast come to their full expression. However, the monstrous guise of the final beast is finally put down.

The beasts more generally have their dominion taken away, but continue for a brief period more as the beastly order of empires as the means by which the final, monstrous form of Rome and the boastful horn are both destroyed.

Earthly kingdoms and empires continue to exist after this time, but they are no longer the expression of the same heavenly authorities. In the place of the old heavenly powers sits the unrivaled son of man in an enduring and everlasting kingdom.

[ 26 : 04 ] This is a kingdom in which all of the saints of God participate. A question to consider, where can you see allusions to Daniel chapter 7 in the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation?