

DANIEL'S VISION OF THE FOUR BEASTS

Chapter 7



Chapter 7 reverts back to the days of Belshazzar, king of Babylon (ca. 553 BC) who was a co-regent with his somewhat retired father, Nabonidus. The four beasts depicted in Chapter 7 seem to parallel the four sections of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Chapter 2 with about 40 years separating the two events. The prophecies of both accounts were intended to encourage the exiled Jews because good days lay ahead when God establishes his kingdom on earth. They also give hope to Christians of all ages knowing that evil will be abolished when God's Kingdom ultimately prevails and is established forever.

A. WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Notice the parallels between this chapter and Chapter 2. Look also for additional details regarding the world kingdoms depicted in this chapter, especially with the addition of the "little horn." Chapters 1 through 6 are historical while Chapters 7-12 are more prophetic.



B. BACKGROUND

This chapter parallels Chapter 2 but adds more information. Chapter 7 takes place during the first year of Belshazzar, about 553 BC. Chapter 7 is a turning point in the Book of Daniel. Chapters 1-6 dealt with Daniel's life and experiences while Chapters 7-12 deal with prophecy. For Daniel prophecies of the Roman Empire were future to Daniel but much is past prophecy to us. While many Bible scholars hold to the traditional view as reflected in this study guide, some hold to a different view.¹

C. DANIEL CHAPTER 7 (NIV)

DANIEL'S VISION OF THE FOUR BEASTS (7:1-8)

"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.² Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.³ Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.⁴ "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.⁵ "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'⁶ "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.⁷ "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast--terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.⁸ "While I was thinking about the horns,

¹ It should be pointed out that not all prophecy experts hold to this traditional view. Some see inconsistencies between chapters 2 and 7. For more information about this see *Daniel: The Bible Made Easy*, by Daymond R. Duck and Larry Richards, p. 172ff.

there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS REIGNS (7:9-12)

⁹ "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. ¹¹ "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. ¹² (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

THE SON OF MAN IS GIVEN DOMINION (7:13-14)

¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

DANIEL'S VISION INTERPRETED (7:15-28)

¹⁵ "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ "The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever-- yes, for ever and ever.' ¹⁹ "Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws-- the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. ²⁰ I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell-- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. ²¹ As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. ²³ "He gave me this explanation: "The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. ²⁴ The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy

people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time. ²⁶ "But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. ²⁷ Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.' ²⁸ "This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.'" (Dan. 7:1-28 NIV)

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY



S. Michael Houdmann offers the following excellent summary of Chapter 7.

"In Daniel 7 the prophet records a night vision that God gave him concerning four world empires, symbolized as four beasts (Daniel 7:1–14). The four empires are the same as Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream in Daniel 2, although in that dream they are pictured as various metals in a statue. Daniel's vision assures us that the world's empires have a certain amount of authority for a certain length of time, but they will all pass away, and "the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:18).

The vision of the four beasts troubles Daniel, and he wonders what it means until an angel explains it to him (Daniel 7:15–27). Even then, the vision and its interpretation continue to cause Daniel distress: "I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself" (verse 28).

Daniel's vision of the four beasts begins with a windy night and a troubled sea: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea" (Daniel 7:2)². As Daniel watches, "four great beasts," each different from the others, emerge from the dark waters (verse 3).

First beast: The first of Daniel's four beasts is "like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle" (Daniel 7:4). As Daniel watches, the wings are torn off the beast, and the creature stands erect like a man and a human mind is given to it. Later, the angel who interprets the dream tells Daniel, "The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth" (verse 17). This first beast is representative of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Its rise to human-like status reflects Nebuchadnezzar's deliverance from

² To the Hebrews the sea was both dangerous and mysterious, a restless element (Isa. 57:20) but not beyond the Lord's power to tame (Psa. 107:23-29). The nations were like the sea (Isa. 17:12-13). (Baldwin 154).

a beastly existence and his insight into the true nature of God (Daniel 4:34–35).

Second beast: The second beast in Daniel’s vision is “like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth” (Daniel 7:5). A voice tells the second beast to devour flesh until it is satisfied. This beast represents the Medo-Persian Empire; the raising up of one side of the creature indicates that one of the kingdom’s parts (Persia) would be dominant. The three ribs in the creature’s mouth symbolize nations that were “devoured” by the Medes and the Persians. These three conquered nations are known to be Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt.

Third beast: The third of the four beasts is “like a leopard,” except it has four bird-like wings on its back and four heads (Daniel 7:6). This beast is given authority to rule. The third beast represents Greece, an empire known for the swiftness of its conquests. The four heads are predictive of the four-way division of the empire following Alexander the Great’s death. Daniel’s vision of the ram and the goat gives further details of the second and third kingdoms (see Daniel 8).

Fourth beast: The final beast that Daniel sees rising from the sea is the most dreadful—“terrifying and frightening and very powerful” (Daniel 7:7). This fourth beast has “bronze claws” (verse 19) and “large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left” totally annihilating its prey (verse 7). The fourth beast has ten horns. This creature represents the Roman Empire, a mighty kingdom that indeed crushed all its foes.

So, Daniel’s vision of the four beasts provided a prophetic look at future world events. Looking back from our perspective, we see these events as world history and can easily see the correlation between each beast and a world empire. However, there was more to Daniel’s vision, and some of it is yet future, even for us.

The Little Horn: Daniel’s attention is drawn to the destructive fourth beast, and he ponders the meaning of its ten horns. Then, a smaller horn begins to grow from the midst of the ten. As the little horn emerges from the beast, three of the original horns are plucked out by the roots. Daniel sees that the little horn has “eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully” (Daniel 7:8). The proud, boastful words of the little horn continue until the Ancient of Days sets up a day of judgment (verses 9–10). At that time, “the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire” (verse 11). This is in contrast to the fate of the other three beasts, who lost their authority but were not immediately destroyed (verse 12).

The Son of Man. After the fourth beast is killed and its body burned, a “son of man” comes from heaven in the clouds. “He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence” (Daniel 7:13). This man is given “authority, glory and sovereign power” (verse 14), and all the nations of earth worship him. The kingdom he rules is everlasting and indestructible.

The Interpretation: As the interpretation of the vision is given to Daniel, the prophet asks specifically about the fourth beast and its horns (Daniel 7:19). The angel explains: the beast's ten horns are ten kings who will arise from that kingdom (verse 24). The little, imposing horn with the eyes and mouth of a human represents a later king; before him three of the original kings will be subdued. This evil king "will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people" (verse 25). He will seek to change times and laws, and he will exert oppressive power over God's people for three and a half years. This world leader that Daniel saw is the Antichrist, the "ruler who will come" who sets up the abomination in Daniel 9:27.

The Antichrist: Given the fact that the Antichrist emerges from the fourth beast leads us to surmise that, in the end times, there will be a "revival" of the Roman Empire, featuring a coalition of ten world leaders. The Antichrist will take his position of leadership at the expense of three of those leaders, and he will eventually wield global authority. A true tyrant, the Antichrist will demand worship and seek to control all aspects of life (see Revelation 13:16-17).

The little horn of Daniel 7 is the first beast of Revelation 13. Notice that the beast in Revelation also has ten horns, and John describes it as resembling "a leopard, but [it] had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion" (Revelation 13:2). In other words, the beast of Revelation contains elements of all of Daniel's beasts. Like Daniel's fourth beast, John's beast speaks proudly and oppresses God's people for three and a half years (Revelation 13:5-7).

The good news is that the reign of the Antichrist is limited: forty-two months, and no more. Then, God promises to judge the little horn. "The court will sit, and [the little horn's] power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever" (Daniel 7:26). Or, as John saw it, "The beast was captured, and [was] thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Revelation 19:20). The Son of Man will rule forever.

It is interesting to compare Daniel's vision of the four beasts with King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a large statue. Both visions symbolize the same kingdoms of the world. In Daniel 2, the king dreams of the earthly kingdoms as "an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance" (Daniel 2:31). However, Daniel sees the same kingdoms as hideous beasts (Daniel 7). So, we have two very different perspectives on the kingdoms mankind builds. The rulers of the world see their kingdoms as imposing, artistic monuments fashioned of valuable metals. However, God's prophets view the same kingdoms as unnatural monsters.

Daniel's vision of the four beasts warned Israel that there would be a procession of enemies and world rulers holding authority over them; however, they should not lose heart. In the end, God is in control, and the Messiah to come will defeat the kingdoms of this world and establish His throne forever (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-

14; Revelation 11:15).”³

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the table below, fill in the column titled, “Kingdoms Represented.”

Image Chapter 2	Beasts Chapter 7	Kingdoms Represented
Head of fine gold	Like a lion with eagle’s wings	
Chest and arms of silver	Like a bear	
Belly and Thighs of Brass	Like a leopard with four wings and four heads	
Legs of Iron, feet of iron and clay	Incomparable beast with ten horns and little horn	
Stone that becomes a great mountain	Messiah and saints receive the kingdom	

2. Who is the “little horn” and what are some of the things he will do?

3. What titles does Daniel use for God in this chapter? For Jesus?

³ S. Michael Houdman, *What Are the Four Beasts in Daniel Chapter 7?* <<https://www.gotquestions.org/Daniel-four-beasts.html>>. Accessed August 18, 2020.

4. What will cause the defeat of the Antichrist, and when will it happen?

5. Do you think Daniel's vision from God made him proud? Describe three ways he was affected by it.

F. CHAPTER WRAP UP

1. We can be confident that God's kingdom will ultimately have victory over the _____.
2. As God's children, we will share in the beauty and eternality of _____.
3. We must never lose sight of the forest (God's kingdom) by staring at _____.