

The beasts and the Son of Man \* Daniel 7  
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Remember the days before COVID when you could travel? You could even cross the border into another country! Incredible, isn't it? You'd pull up to the border guard and they'd say – "Citizenship?" and then you'd say 'Canadian' and off you'd go.



The passage of Scripture that we're going to look at today is a bit like that, in a couple of ways – we're going to take a trip – into the weird and wonderful world of apocalyptic - to ultimately ask 'what is our citizenship?' The majority of us are Canadians and proud of it, but on a spiritual level, what is your citizenship? Do you belong to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of man?

Let's go to Daniel 7 and I'll show you why I say that. Daniel chapter 7 and I do recommend that you have your Bible open in front of you because there's a lot to take in here. Daniel chapter 7.

Daniel chapter 7 actually takes us back in time, to the first year of King Belshazzar's reign. Belshazzar has just taken power and Daniel starts dream. Nebuchadnezzar has had a few dreams, now it's Daniel who has a vision of the future. And what a vision it is! Daniel 7, verse 2.

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 man, and the heart of a man 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, 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 man and a mouth that spoke boastfully (Dan 7:2-8 NIV).

What did I tell you? Weird and wonderful.

This is the first part of Daniel's dream. Four different creatures have come up out of the sea (which is ANE code of 'chaos') and are standing on the shore for us to see.

We've got something like a lion with the wings of an eagle that is made to stand on two feet.

We've got something like a bear raised up on one side and looking ferocious.

We've got something like a leopard with four wings and four heads. And something unlike any of the others – iron teeth, warring horns - terrifying and frightening and very powerful.

And as Daniel is standing there, looking at them, verse 9 continues –

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.

In contrast to the chaos of the beasts, the Ancient of Days is pictured in total control, in peace and authority. The beasts are... beasts but God is a person and not just a person but a ruler.

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. [You'd think given the description that Daniel gives us that this thing is going to put up a fight, but no, the Ancient of Days just says 'that's enough' and out it goes like a used tissue.]

12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

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. [Quick aside – where did the beasts come from? From the sea, from out of chaos. Where does the Son of Man come from? From Heaven. From stability].

14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men 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.

15 "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.

Imagine waking up in the morning with THAT in your head! You'd be thinking about that all day. Daniel though doesn't have to wait long to figure out what it all means.

16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things:

17 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.

18 But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever--yes, for ever and ever.'

That's really the heart of it. Four great beasts are four great kingdoms who will rise against the kingdom of God but the Ancient of Days will ultimately overcome them and give the Kingdom to His people. That's really the heart of this vision.

But Daniel is really curious about this fourth beast and so, verse 19 -

19 "Then I wanted to know the true 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.

Daniel asks about the beast and then we get something of a preview – it's like Daniel is enabled to watch a moment in history – far into the future – unfold before him. Verse 21 -

21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them,  
22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints 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 saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him 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 the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the 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 7:17-28 NIV).

Daniel's dream.

So let's talk about this. The guy in the dream makes the interpretation a little easier for us. The four beasts are four kingdoms that rise in opposition to the kingdom of God. God though and the Son of Man triumph over the beasts and the people of God inherit the kingdom. That's the broad strokes of the dream and frankly the broad strokes of human history.

For Daniel, everything in the dream was still in the future, but we can look back and see it unfolding in history.

The first beast, the lion with eagles' wings, is none other than the empire that Daniel is currently in. Babylon. The wings being torn off and the beast raised to its feet could be the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar that we saw in chapter 4 when he turned to acknowledge God's power in his life.

The second best, the one like a bear, is the empire of the Medes and Persians – the one that Darius leads – like in the chapter 6 – the lions' den. The Medes and the Persians joined together as an empire, but the Persian side was always stronger, which is probably why it was raised up on one side, one stronger than the other. It tore through the ANE, always eager for more territory.

The third beast, the one like the leopard with four wings and four heads, is the Greek/Hellenistic empire, under Alexander the Great. Alexander's armies flew through the ANE with the speed of a leopard, conquering a kingdom that stretched from Greece to Egypt to India in just 13 years. When Alexander died though, the kingdom split into four parts which is why the beast has four heads.

And then the fourth beast, with the iron teeth and angry horns, is Rome. Rome's armies steamrolled the Mediterranean world with mechanical efficiency and lasted a long time, so that there would be lots of time for those ten plus one kings to arise.

The Ancient of Days of course is God and the Son of Man is His Son, Jesus, who came to receive authority over all the earth. Jesus called Himself 'the Son of Man' over and over in His lifetime (more than 25 times in Matthew's Gospel alone) and when He stood before the Jewish authorities before His Crucifixion He specifically identified Himself as the Son of Man that Daniel saw. Matthew 26: 64 He says - "Yes, it is as you say [I am the Son of God]," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus clearly understood that He was the Son of Man that Daniel saw in his dream.

So in a sense, everything in this dream had already happened by the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. The lion (Babylon), the bear (Medo-Persia), the leopard (Greece) and the fourth beast (Rome) had all taken their turn on the world stage. During Rome's time though, the Son of Man came to receive authority from the Ancient of Days and returned to sit at the right hand of God. Dream fulfilled.

But since this is apocalyptic prophecy, there is a sense in which it is yet to come. And the final beast is not only different from the others in the sense that it looks like nothing anyone has ever seen – (leopard, lion, bear, Mechagodzilla) – it is different in the sense that it represents something yet to come. Something that hasn't happened yet. The fact that Daniel spends so much time thinking about this beast and the fact that he sees a preview of it (v. 23 and on) suggests that there's more to this beast than just Rome.

And when you put it side by side with another beast from apocalyptic prophecy, it looks kind of familiar. Now remember, apocalyptic prophecy is a bit like looking at a photocopy of an old photo – it's the big picture that counts. It can be hard to make out the details but it's the broad strokes that matter.

Daniel 7, 24 and onwards, you've got a beast with many horns (many kings) that opposes the Most High and oppresses His people, making every effort to overthrow the kingdom of God. Verse 26 says - The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. (A year, two years and half a year – that's 3.5 years that the beast will persecute the saints but the verse 26 - 26 " 'But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. (Dan 7:25-26 NIV).

Now jump ahead to Revelation 13, you've got a beast coming out of the water, that looks like a leopard, a bear and lion that has ten horns and ten crowns and is permitted to make war against the saints and to conquer them. That's verse 7. Then verse 5 - 5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. Forty two 30 day months is 3.5 years (in the Hebrew calendar).

John, in the book of Revelation, saw the same beast that Daniel saw as a sign of what was to come. The empires of man, all aspects of which find themselves in that final beast (lion, leopard, bear) will oppose the people of God and attempt to overthrow God's kingdom once and for all.

And yet, God will triumph in the end. God will overthrow the kingdoms of man and give His Kingdom to His people.

And Daniel has very subtly been leading us up to this point. I haven't mentioned this yet, but there is a chiasm, a mirror point in chapters 2-7. It's easy to miss in English, but in the original text, chapter one is in Hebrew, then two through seven switch to Aramaic, and then back to Hebrew in chapter 8 (In 2:4 it indicates that the language switches). Which means 2-7 go together.

And look at what Daniel's done. Chapters 2-7 – the outside – are all about kingdoms. A statue with four parts that represent four kingdoms, shattered by a rock cut not by human hands that spreads across the earth. Four beasts that oppose the people of God but are ultimately overcome by the Son of Man. Chapters 2 and 7 say there are two different kingdoms – the kingdom of God and the Kingdom of man.

Take a step inwards, chapters 3 and 6, you've got the fiery furnace and the lions' den. Not only are there two kingdoms; the kingdom of man stands in opposition to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of man in every generation will threaten the people of God but God is a deliverer; God will overcome.

And then take one more step inwards, chapters 4 and 5. What are you going to do with the knowledge of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of man? Humbly acknowledge the sovereignty and provision of the kingdom of God, or proudly go your way, in your own little kingdom of man?

Daniel has been bringing us along to this point to ask – what is your citizenship? The kingdom of God or the kingdom of man?

Pledge allegiance to the eternal kingdom of God.

The kingdoms of man will always oppose the purposes of God but God's kingdom alone will last forever. I don't know if you've noticed this, but Daniel tells us again and again that God's kingdom will never end. Daniel 2:44 – God's kingdom will endure forever. 4:3 His dominion endures from generation to generation. 4:34 His dominion is an eternal dominion. 6:26 His dominion will never end. 7:14 His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. 7:24 His kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom.

God's Kingdom alone will last into eternity. Human kingdoms will rise and fall but God's Kingdom is the only one that will last. And God's people will inherit that eternal kingdom. Three times in chapter 7 he says that. 7:18 The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever. Verse 22 The saints will possess the kingdom. Verse 27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. (Dan 7:27 NIV). The kingdoms of man will come and go but the people of God will inherit His eternal kingdom.

How do you get to be a people of the Most High?

Pledge allegiance to the eternal kingdom of God. Put your trust in the Son of man. Jesus came to cleanse us from the sinful aspects of the kingdoms of man and prepare us for the kingdom of God. Put your faith in Him and pledge allegiance to the eternal kingdom of God.

What does that mean for us on a practical level? Let me give you two thoughts.

1. Have confidence in the coming kingdom. It sometimes looks as though God is not in control. It sometimes looks as though the kingdoms of man are triumphing over the will of God. In those moments, renew your confidence in the kingdom of God. That's the beauty of apocalyptic prophecy – it pulls back the corner on reality and shows things for what they really are. We may face opposition now but God, who alone saves, will triumph in the end.

I think Sinclair Ferguson is helpful here – “Our gaze must always penetrate beyond the terrible events of history to the throne of God. Only in the assurance that He reigns will we be able to live triumphantly when we cannot trace or understand His plan of victory” (*Daniel, Mastering the Old Testament*, 166).

Have confidence in the coming kingdom.

And 2. Live as a citizen of the kingdom now. We will inherit the earth, but just because that hasn't happened yet doesn't mean we shouldn't start living like it now. The standards of the world are different from the standards of God, but we are in effect ambassadors of the Kingdom here and now. Live your life as a citizen of the Kingdom, living with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness in the midst of a culture that grumbles and gripes and complains. We seek first the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of man and live in light of His coming rule. Live as a citizen of the kingdom now.

Pledge allegiance to the eternal kingdom.