

BEASTS OF THOSE NATIONS

DANIEL 7:1-8 JANUARY 16, 2019

If you have a Bible, please join me at Daniel chapter 7. We always encourage you to follow along with us here at Calvary. But if you're not in the habit, I would especially urge you to have the text open on your lap so that you can see these passages for yourself. I believe it will be immensely helpful for you to be able to see these words for yourself as you're listening.

This is an immensely significant portion of Scripture. In this second half of the book, God reveals to us what His plan for human history is. And we want to remind ourselves that the prophecies in Daniel are absolutely essential when it comes to interpreting the *other* prophetic portions of Scripture.

Let me quote Dr. John Walvoord:

*"...Daniel is essential to the structure of prophecy and is the key to the entire Old Testament prophetic revelation...Daniel alone reveals the details of God's plan for both the nations and Israel."*¹

Daniel's prophecies are not only *significant*, they're so *accurate* that skeptics and critics wear themselves out trying to convince the world that they must have been written by an impostor, hundreds of years after the fact. They have no evidence for such a claim, only an unwillingness to believe that an all-knowing God could actually reveal the future and have it recorded for all to read.

Now, when it comes to Bible prophecy, we need to consider our approach to interpretation. Over a quarter of the Bible is prophetic in nature. So the question becomes: How are we to decode it and understand it? Among Christians there is serious division on these issues. Take the Millennial Kingdom, for example. One group says there will be a literal, physical, 1,000 year Kingdom, ruled by Jesus Christ at some point in the future. Another group says Christ will only return after we "build" the Kingdom ourselves by causing Christianity to dominate the world. A third group says we are in the Millennial Kingdom *right now!* Those are pretty big divides, not between Christians and non-Christians, but within the Church itself.

Here at Calvary, we would define ourselves as PreMillennial, PreTribulational, Futurists who believe in the literal interpretation of Bible prophecy. If you want to talk to us about any of those terms, you can speak with me or Pastor Gene or Pastor Jake after our service. But, for our purpose tonight, we remind ourselves that prophecy should be taken *literally* in the sense that it corresponds to real events that have or will *actually* happen in our world. Having a literal interpretation *does not* mean we don't recognize symbols or allegories or figures of speech. For example: Tonight we'll see a vision of 4 beasts rising out of the sea. Having a literal interpretation of this vision *does not* mean we think that Godzilla and Rodan are going to rise out of the ocean and smash New York City. But we *do* believe that this vision gives *clear* symbols of real figures and events that transpire in human history.

There are 2 major reasons why we take the literal approach to interpreting Bible prophecy. First of all, it is the only consistent approach. If prophecy is *not* meant to be understood or decoded literally, then *who* gets to decide what these words mean? Whose rubric do we use to understand what's going on and what's being symbolized? To assume prophecy is *figurative* is to place the reader *above* Scripture as the authority, rather than the other way around.

¹ John Walvoord Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation

But the second reason for reading prophecy literally is not just philosophical, it's *historical!* The Bible is filled with thousands of prophecies. And thousands of them have been really, truly, clearly fulfilled to the letter. We were told the Christ was coming to Bethlehem. He came. We are told an AntiChrist is coming...he'll come! We're told the kingdom of Babylon would be followed by Persia, then Greece, then Rome. That all happened. We're told that a physical Kingdom, ruled by Jesus from Jerusalem will wrap up human history. Why should that be any less literal?

With that said, we recognize that there *are* variations in the interpretation of prophecy, even among futurists who take these things literally. For example: Some people, who read the Bible in the way we do, say the AntiChrist *must* be Roman. Others say he *must* be Assyrian. Others say he *must* be a Jew! Still others say there is no *must* in this regard. And that's ok. There is room for variety in these details. But the flow of God's program is pretty clearly laid out if you read literally, as a futurist. I'm sure at some point in these 6 chapters I will say something that, perhaps, is different than someone who's a great scholar and better preacher than I am. That's ok. We don't need to go to war. But we do want to try to understand what God has given us to learn in these texts.

In Daniel 7 we are given the vision of 4 Beasts, which correspond to 4 earthly kingdoms. Already, we should be thinking of Daniel chapter 2 and Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and all that we learned there. Passages like the one we're about to read don't exist in isolation.

What we'll find is that the overall character of this vision is violence, destruction, brutality, culminating in hideous blasphemy. Spoiler alert: That's the way this world is headed. Commentators point out that, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, when *he* saw these kingdoms, oh they were splendid and glorious! Made of precious metals, great to behold. When Daniel sees these kingdoms, as a heavenly-minded servant of God, he sees them for what they really are: Grotesque monstrosities, bringing ruin and slaughter to the world.

Let's begin at verse 1.

Daniel 7:1 - In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head *while* on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.

Chronologically speaking, Daniel had this dream sometime between chapter 4 and chapter 5. It's at least 14 years before the lion's den. And here we're told that he has recorded for us "the main facts." Meaning, there was (undoubtedly) more detail in the vision, but this is what recorded for us.

Before moving on I'd simply have us note that this great vision came to Daniel in his first retirement, and in the middle of the night. The Lord works on *His* schedule, our part is to be ready and waiting.

Daniel 7:2 - ² Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.

In the second half of the book, Daniel refers to himself in the first person. To deny that he really wrote these things is to challenge the truthfulness of the Bible. If Daniel didn't write this book, then the Bible is not the inspired, inerrant message it claims to be. If Daniel can't be trusted, how can we trust Genesis or Matthew or any other text?

We see 4 winds of heaven stirring up a great sea. Commentators argue over whether this is the Mediterranean sea or not. The specific geography isn't that important. Some scholars feel it is

significant because the kingdoms described all had some geographic relation to the Mediterranean sea, but, as we saw before with Nebuchadnezzar's vision, the flow of God's program has more to do with *Israel* than anything else. There have been *many* other kingdoms in human history than the 4 most often discussed in the Bible. Britain. The Huns. The Qing Dynasty. God's prophetic revelation concerns those that have a specific relationship to *Israel*. Or, the case can be made in this vision, those kingdoms which specifically relate to the rule over the city of Babylon.

Generally speaking, in the Bible the 'sea' is often used a symbol of the Gentile nations of the world. We see that comparison made in the Psalms, in Isaiah, in Revelation. And, it's clear that is the idea in Daniel's vision. We're told as much in verse 17 of this chapter. Notice the *character* of the sea: Choppy. Distressed. Agitated. Restless. On the one hand, mankind wishes for lasting peace, but on the other, history is the story of a raging storm, producing empire after empire, none of which have brought true peace to this world.

Daniel 7:3 - ³ And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

These symbols are decoded for us in verses 17 and 23. The beasts are 4 *kings*, not just individually, but also their kingdoms by extension. It's the same pattern we saw in Daniel 2. Daniel said, "You, Nebuchadnezzar, are the head of gold." But the head of gold also covered the *empire* of Babylon past Nebuchadnezzar's rule. The flow of kingdoms in this text follows the same order as in the earlier dream. Starting with Babylon, then Medo-Persia, then Greece then Rome. Though each of the beasts is *different*, not one is good. Each is terrible and violent - dangerous villains.

Daniel 7:4a - ⁴ The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings.

A lion symbolizes strength and royalty. The eagle's wings communicate that this lion was not only ferocious, it could move quickly. This describes Nebuchadnezzar's reign quite well. He was, undoubtedly, king of the jungle. And, while he ruled, he was able to conquer with great speed. But then we see the rest of the verse.

Daniel 7:4b - I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

Some commentators, like Dr. J. Vernon McGee, believe this to be depicting the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar and his conversion. Others feel that it is referring to the fact that, after Nebuchadnezzar died, the kingdom of Babylon became *weaker*. They lost the lion's heart. No longer did they conquer quickly. The wings were gone. The lion, in that state, wasn't long for this world.

Daniel 7:5a - ⁵ "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear.

The Medo-Persian took Babylon overnight. It was a sudden appearing in that sense. Now, bears are not known for speed, but for a sort of lumbering, mauling strength. This well characterizes the reign of Xerxes, who took 2.5 million troops with him to march against Greece.² Ancient sources record that when Darius III fought against Alexander the Great at the Battle of Issus, the Persians had half a million soldiers in the fight.³ This Medo-Persian bear may have been slower, but it certainly was bigger than the lion before it. In fact, it was larger than any previous empire in history.⁴

² John Phillips, Jerry Vines Exploring The Book Of Daniel

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Issus

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achæmenid_Empire

Daniel 7:5b - It was raised up on one side, and *had* three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: ‘Arise, devour much flesh!’

The three ribs in its mouth may refer to the 3 chief cities of the Babylonian empire (*Ironsides*), or to the 3 kingdoms that came under Persian control: Babylon, Egypt and Lydia (*Phillips/Vines*). A voice calls out, commanding the bear to devour much flesh. Medo-Persia was enormously hungry and fantastically fierce. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian wrote: “*The armored Persian horsemen and their death dealing chariots were invincible. No man dared face them.*”

Daniel 7:6 - ⁶“After this I looked, and there was another, 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.

The 3rd kingdom is Greece, led by Alexander the Great. We’re back in the cat family, but this time, it’s a leopard, not a lion. Leopards are significantly smaller, about half the size of a lion. And yet, “what they lack in size they make up for in strength.”⁵ They’ve been known to take down animals *3 times their size!* This was certainly true of the lean and mean army of Alexander. What started small quickly brought down the giant, lumbering bear. If Babylon had been described as speedy in verse 4, this beast is *double* fast, having 4 wings. The beast, we’re told, had 4 heads. This was perfectly fulfilled after Alexander’s death. The Grecian empire was divided up under his 4 generals. Daniel will spend more time discussing the Greek empire specifically in chapters 8 and 11.

But here we see it says, “dominion was *given* to [this beast].” The bear had been commanded by a heavenly voice. The lion had been handled by some unseen force, which could pick it up and pluck off its wings at will. Above *all* of these beasts there was a much higher, much greater power. We’re reminded that God, *not man*, is in charge of the flow of human history. If you find yourself trusting in some human government or political party or elected official, remember what you’re seeing here. All human governments, for all their majesty and power and many promises to do great things, underneath are defined by sin and are destroyers, not saviors. But, we can continue to hope in heaven, because the Lord stands above all these eras and all these kingdoms, and He will have His way. That is a comforting thought as we turn to see the 4th and final beast.

Daniel 7:7 - ⁷“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

Daniel pauses at the beginning of the verse to gather our attention. “I saw.” “Behold!” The three previous beasts were only the opening acts for this, the final monster.

It is so terrible, Daniel doesn’t bother to liken it to an animal. However, this passage doesn’t exist in isolation. We have other texts to compare this to. We also know that Revelation speaks of this beast in chapter 13. There, interestingly, John gives us additional description of what this thing looks like: “the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of a bear*, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.” A blending of all the great monsters before it. Merciless and strong.

For his part, Daniel highlights the unstoppable brutality of this kingdom, which is Rome. Rome in its first stage was a dominant force. One writer said:

⁵ <https://animals.howstuffworks.com/mammals/leopard-prey.htm>

“The Romans displayed the awesome ability to conquer and hold large swaths of territory for hundreds or even thousands of years, if the Eastern Roman Empire is accounted for.”⁶

The Greek historian Polybius recorded that, at the sack of New Carthage, Roman soldiers were ordered to:

“Exterminate every form of life they encountered, sparing none(...) so when cities are taken by the Romans you may often see not only corpses of human beings but dogs cut in half and the dismembered limbs of other animals.”⁷

John Walvoord writes:

“The Roman empire was ruthless in its destruction of civilizations and peoples, killing captives by the thousands and selling them into slavery by the hundreds of thousands.”⁸

Daniel 7:8 - ⁸I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

We remember that, in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Rome is the kingdom of iron and is presented in 2 pieces or stages. The legs were iron, then the feet were a second stage: iron mixed with clay.

Here we see that, at some point, a little horn will appear and come to power by overthrowing 3 of the 10 rulers of the kingdom. He will be defined by pride and blasphemy. We can fill in the gaps of verse 8 by taking a look at verses 21 through 27 of this chapter, which we will in later studies. But, as we wrap up tonight, here’s what we learn:

This little horn is a man who leads a kingdom unlike any other the world has ever seen, which will dominate and rule the whole earth, persecuting the saints of the Most High God for 3 and a half years, but then be defeated, having his dominion taken away and given to those saints, who will then rule in an everlasting kingdom with the Son of Man. That simply hasn’t happened.

Nebuchadnezzar happened. Xerxes happened. Alexander the Great happened. Rome, in its first stage, happened. But then Rome was never truly conquered. It fell apart and now waits to be put back together. And, when it is, it will be ultimately ruled by this little horn, the AntiChrist. He is real and he is coming. But the good news is this: Christ is coming for His Church *first*. Paul promised in 2nd Thessalonians that the Man of Sin would not be revealed until *after* the restrainer is taken out of the way. It is *after* we are raptured to heaven that the little horn will rise up and have his short dominion. In the mean time, we can take comfort in the fact that God is most definitely in charge. Government may not be a *friend* to us, but we need not be *afraid* of it, in any form, because we serve a God of victory. In the mean time, we should spread the message that we’ve received.

From 1918 to 1926, in a remote part of the Himalayas in India, there was a leopard who had developed the taste for human flesh. During those years, he killed at least 125 people, until he was finally tracked and killed by a hunter named Jim Corbett.⁹

⁶ <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-5-most-powerful-empires-history-12296>

⁷ http://www.academia.edu/10776796/Killing_Beyond_the_Battlefield_Brutality_and_the_Roman_Soldier

⁸ John Walvoord Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation

⁹ <https://animals.howstuffworks.com/mammals/leopard-prey.htm>

Imagine you lived in that time and *knew* the leopard was in the area. What would you do? If you saw some children playing outside their homes? Even better, what if some traveller had crossed your path and given you the recipe for a simple repellent that would keep you safe from attack?

3 beasts have come and gone. A fourth is coming. Those who are not in Christ are as unsafe as a person can be. We know the end of the story. We know how to get people to safety. Let's spread this message of hope as quickly as we can and get excited about the everlasting Kingdom that's on its way.