

Daniel 7:1-18

⁷ 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.

² Daniel spoke, saying, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. ³ And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. ⁴ The first *was* like a lion, and had eagle’s wings. 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.

⁵ “And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. 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!’

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.

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. ⁸ I 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.

⁹ “I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment *was* white as snow,
And the hair of His head *was* like pure wool.
His throne *was* a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
¹⁰ A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;

Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.

The court was seated,

And the books were opened.

¹¹ “I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

¹³ “I was watching in the night visions,

And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,

Coming with the clouds of heaven!

He came to the Ancient of Days,

And they brought Him near before Him.

¹⁴ Then 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 *the one*

Which shall not be destroyed.

¹⁵ “I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within *my* body, and the visions of my head troubled

me. ¹⁶ I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me

and made known to me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ ‘Those great beasts, which are

four, *are* four kings *which* arise out of the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High shall receive

the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.’

Last week we entered into the prophetic section of the Book of Daniel. As we discussed then, the theme of the narrative sections of the book of Daniel was the sovereignty of God and the advance of His kingdom. This week we are going to look in a little more detail at Daniel’s dream and we will look at the dream and explore what it meant for Daniel and what it means for the Church today.

I want to start by looking at verse 15 of Chapter 7. Daniel had this dream. And before it was even interpreted we read: ¹⁵ “*I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.* Daniel did not yet know the meaning of the dream, and yet he was grieved in his spirit and his thoughts were troubled. This dream was clearly of major significance and until the interpretation was told to Daniel he was bothered by it.

What I want to do today as we explore the dream and it’s meaning is look at some of the symbolism that it is in the text and talk about what it means. I also want us to keep in mind the overall theme of the Book of Daniel.

Keeping that in mind let us read again the last two verses of our text:

¹⁷ ‘Those great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings *which* arise out of the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.’

We briefly talked about this last week but in the reading of Scripture, there is the land and the sea. The sea represents the gentile nations, and the land, ‘*ha aretz*’ as it is said in the Hebrew speaks of the promised land to the nation of Israel, yet it has other connotations, but so many of the promises of the Old Testament have to do with the promise of land. And usually when we read of a contrast between the land and the sea it means we are speaking Israel versus the nations.

In verse 3 of Daniel’s dream we see the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. Last week we talked about Psalm 2. Why do the nations rage and take counsel against the Lord and against His Christ? The gentile nations which are stirred up by the four winds are raging. We are told in verse 17 that these beasts that come out of the sea are four kings. These four kings represent four kingdoms and these kingdoms are the ruling powers of the world up to and until the kingdom of Christ comes.

The first kingdom is represented by a lion that had the wings of an eagle. The kingdom represented by this beast is Babylon. In Daniel 2 when Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Nebuchadnezzar is told, that he was the head of gold. Here we are not given that information, but from other Biblical references and the similarity of the dreams we can make that conclusion.

In Jeremiah 4:7 a text that is speaking of the Babylonian King we read:

*The lion has come up from his thicket,
And the destroyer of nations is on his way.
He has gone forth from his place
To make your land desolate.
Your cities will be laid waste,
Without inhabitant.*

Another account of the Babylonians in Isaiah 5:29 says: *Their roaring will be like a lion, They will roar like young lions; Yes, they will roar And lay hold of the prey; They will carry it away safely, And no one will deliver.*

The wings of eagles on the Lions back is thought to represent the rapid speed at which Nebuchadnezzar, made his conquests; for in a very brief time, he brought his empire to such an extent, and raised it to such a degree of eminence, as was truly surprising; and all tended to show with what propriety this eagle-winged lion is here made his emblem. The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel also speak of the Eagle, represented by Babylon as making conquests.

Adam Clarke said this of the first beast, *"The lion is considered the king of the beasts, and the eagle the king of the birds; and therefore the kingdom of Babylon, which was signified by the golden head of the great image, was the first and noblest of all the kingdoms; and was the greatest then in being."*

The last part of verse 4 Daniel writes, *"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."* The word used for to pluck is the Hebrew word, (מֵרַט *meraf*) which means, to pluck or

pull, as to pull out the beard. The obvious meaning of this symbol is, that there was some check put to the progress of the conqueror - as there would be to an eagle by plucking off the feathers from his wings; that is, the rapidity of his conquests would cease. The prophet says, that he looked on until this was done, implying that it was not accomplished at once, but leaving the impression that these conquests were extended far. They were, however, checked, and we see the lion again without the wings; the sovereign who has ceased to spread his triumphs over the earth.

and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon the feet as a man.” That is, the lion, with the wings thus plucked off, was made to stand upright on his hind feet - an unusual position, but the meaning of the symbol is not difficult. It was still the lion - the monarch - but changed as if the lion was changed to a man; that is, as if the ferocity, and the power, and the energy of the lion had given place to the comparative weakness of a man.

The giving to it of a man’s heart: “and a man heart was given to it.” The word heart in the Scriptures often has a closer relation to the intellect or the understanding than it new has commonly with us; and here perhaps it is a general term to denote something like human nature - that is, there would be as great a change in the case as if the nature of the lion should be transformed to that of a man; or, the meaning may be, that this mighty empire, carrying its arms with the rapidity of an eagle, and the fierceness of a lion, through the world, would be checked in its career; its ferocity would be tamed, and it would be characterized by comparative moderation and humanity.

In [Dan 4:16](#), it is said of Nebuchadnezzar, “Let his heart be changed from man’s, and let a beast’s heart be given unto him;” here, if the symbol refers to him, it does not refer to that scene of humiliation when he was compelled to eat grass like a beast, but to the fact that he was brought to look at things as a man should do; he ceased to act like a ravenous beast, and was led to calm reflection, and to think and speak like a man - a rational being. Or, if it refers to the empire of Babylon, instead of the monarch, it would mean that a change had come over the nation under the succession of princes, so that the fierceness and ferocity of the first princes of the empire had ceased, and the nation had not only closed its conquests, but had actually become, to some extent, moderate and rational.

All, or nearly all, of the commentators agree that this refers to the kingdom of Babylon, of which Nebuchadnezzar was the head, and to the gradual diminution of the ferocity of conquest under a succession of comparatively weak princes.

⁵ *“And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. 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 next beast appears suddenly. This is noteworthy. Because while the Kingdom of Babylon seemed to lose its ferocity over time, the suddenness of the arrival of the second beast should draw our attention to the events at the end of Daniel 5. This is where King Belshazzar is feasting with 1,000 of his choicest nobles with the implements from the temple in Jerusalem and the hand appears and begins to write on the wall. After this incident when Daniel is called to read and interpret these words we read that very night Belshazzar was slain. The kingdom was doing well, or so it seems and then ‘suddenly’ it was no more.

The bear represented the Medo-Persian empire, as the largest species of these animals was found in Media, a mountainous, cold, and rough country, covered with woods. The Medes and Persians are compared to a bear on account of their cruelty and thirst after blood, a bear being a most voracious and cruel animal; the bear is termed by Aristotle an all-devouring animal; and the Medo-Persians are known to have been great robbers and spoilers. In Jeremiah 51 starting in verse 8 the prophet speaks of the fall of Babylon this way:

⁸ *Then the heavens and the earth and all that is in them
Shall sing joyously over Babylon;
For the plunderers shall come to her from the north,” says the LORD.*

⁴⁹ *As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall,
So at Babylon the slain of all the earth shall fall.*

⁵⁰ *You who have escaped the sword,
Get away! Do not stand still!
Remember the LORD afar off,
And let Jerusalem come to your mind.*

*⁵¹ We are ashamed because we have heard reproach.
Shame has covered our faces,
For strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the LORD's house.
⁵² "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD,
"That I will bring judgment on her carved images,
And throughout all her land the wounded shall groan.
⁵³ Though Babylon were to mount up to heaven,
And though she were to fortify the height of her strength,
Yet from Me plunderers would come to her," says the LORD.
⁵⁴ The sound of a cry comes from Babylon,
And great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans,
⁵⁵ Because the LORD is plundering Babylon
And silencing her loud voice,
Though her waves roar like great waters,
And the noise of their voice is uttered,
⁵⁶ Because the plunderer comes against her, against Babylon,
And her mighty men are taken.
Every one of their bows is broken;
For the LORD is the God of recompense,
He will surely repay.*

I have read Daniel many times, and I have a good idea of the overall picture of the events that are happening in this book, even in the prophetic sections, but there are details that always bother me. And two of them are in Daniel 7:5. What is the significance of the bear being raised up on one side and why does the bear have three ribs in its teeth?

One cannot read this book without marveling a bit at all the heads of the beasts and all the horns. These symbols in fact are going to be greatly significant as we read further, but then there are these other symbols that are there and yet their meanings are somewhat obscure. The beast being raised up on one side is one of those symbols that people differ on its meaning. Some take this to mean the bear was in position to pounce or attack, while the view that seems to fit better to me

is the view that one side is favored over the other. James Jordan puts it this way, he says many take it as speaking of the ascendancy of Persia over Media. In context, however, given that the phrase “caused to stand” has just referred to the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar this phrase more likely refers to that fact that Cyrus and/or Darius the great favored the Jews and wanted the temple of Yahweh to be built. That being the case the standing on one side in opposition to the other Persian monarchs like Cambyses who opposed the Jews.

As for the three ribs in the bears mouth something that is important for us to realize is that prophecy is never just general information about the world. The focus of prophecy is always on God’s kingdom or God’s people. Rib’s is an unusual way to speak of three bones in the mouth of the bear. But rib should cause us to look back at Genesis 2 where God took a rib from the side of Adam and closed up the flesh. Jordan again points out that the three ribs refers to the Jews, the special bride of Yahweh, who is the new Eve. The bear is invited to eat *into itself* many of God’s people. Do not think of this as devouring them where they are no more, but see how the Persians made much use of the Jews in the Persian court. Examples of this in Scripture are of course Daniel, Mordecai in the Book of Esther, and of Nehemiah.

I want to take a moment to point out that we often read prophecy very wrong when we attempt to become supra literal. Let me briefly explain, and hope not to offend anyone here, but between 1995 and 2007 there was a popular series of Christian novels known as the “Left Behind” series. There were sixteen books in this series and it was all about a group of people who were ‘left behind’ after the rapture of the church. This series did not invent the idea of being left behind but it focused on certain verses in Matthew 24:36-44 Let me read this to you:

³⁶ “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷ But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know

this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The rapture or the idea of one being taken and one left over numerous circumstances is often read into this account and yet these events in context are speaking of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem which took place in A.D. 70. Being taken was not a reference to the rapture and so the idea of being left behind was bad, but when these verse are read in context the ones that were taken were likely those taken by the Roman armies. How we read prophecy of necessity will affect what we consider literal and what we do not.

I will talk about this more, but for now, hopefully, we can see why such a view is problematic.

This brings us to the third beast in Daniel's dream.

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.

This third beast is spoken of in greater detail in chapter 8 and we will talk about it in more detail in the 8th chapter but this beast represented the Macedonian or Greek empire; and Alexander the Great was its king. Alexander and his subjects are fitly compared to a leopard.

The leopard is remarkable for its swiftness. Alexander and the Macedonians were very rapid in their conquests. Also the leopard is a spotted animal; a proper emblem of the various nations, with their various customs and languages, which constituted the Macedonian empire. It may refer to the character of Alexander himself, sometimes mild, at others cruel; sober and drunken; continent and lecherous; having a great power of self-government, and at other times being a slave to his passions.

The leopard, though small, is also not afraid to attack the lion.

The Babylonian empire was represented with two wings; and they sufficiently marked the rapidity of Nebuchadnezzar's conquests; but the Macedonian has here four wings; for nothing, in the history of the world, was equal to the conquests of Alexander, who ran through all the

countries from Illyricum and the Adriatic Sea to the Indian Ocean and the River Ganges; and in twelve years subdued part of Europe, and all Asia.

The other aspect of this beast that I want us to pay attention to is that it has four heads. Conservative commentators are almost all agreed that this represents that after the death of Alexander, the kingdom was divided between his four generals. Cassander reigning over Macedon and Greece; Lysimachus, over Thrace and Bithynia; Ptolemy, over Egypt; and Seleucus, over Syria. But what I want us to see is when we add up the combined heads and horns of the 4 beasts, and we will see this with the description of the fourth terrible beast that there are 7 heads and 10 horns.

We may think this is insignificant, but in Revelation 12:3, 7-9 we read this description: ³ *And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.* ⁷ *And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,* ⁸ *but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.* ⁹ *So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

Last week we spoke about the heathen nations waging war against the Lord and against His Christ, and we will ultimately see the embodiment of this with these kingdoms. Again, I know I am throwing a lot of information at us, but each of these beasts are important because they are all ultimately done away with and they are overcome by the Kingdom that will know no end.

The fourth beast is described as dreadful and terrible it is not described as any similar beast. It is characterized by its ferocity. It is described as having iron teeth. And it is also described as different from the other beasts that had come before it. And it is also described as having ten horns. (Note: 7 heads and 10 horns)

One of the horns rises up and speaks pompous words. There are many various interpretations as to who this is. Dispensational commentators view this little horn as the “future” anti-Christ, and

yet I will be showing us that this little horn is really the apostate ministry of the Jews in the empire particularly focused on Herod the Great.

But I do not want to spend my time focusing there today. I want to look at the last verses of this text:

⁹ *“I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment was white as snow,
And the hair of His head was like pure wool.*

*His throne was a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
¹⁰ A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated,
And the books were opened.*

¹¹ *“I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.*

¹³ *“I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
¹⁴ Then 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 the one
Which shall not be destroyed.*

Just like in Daniel 2 the focus of that dream of Nebuchadnezzar was the rock formed without hands that struck the base of the image and became a mountain that overcame the whole world, the focus of Daniel's dream is the *One like the Son of Man*,
Coming with the clouds of heaven, and coming to the Ancient of Days.

And now I want us to look at the theme of the Book,

*¹⁴ Then 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 the one
Which shall not be destroyed.*

*COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN → Not about the second coming, but about the
Ascension of Jesus Christ*

¹² As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

