

Daniel 7:1-28

Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts

Daniel 7:1 - "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters."

Notice that Daniel had this vision much earlier than when we left off last week. The vision came during the reign of Belshazzar, long before the Medes and Persians invaded and Belshazzar was killed (**Daniel 5**).

Chapter 1-6 of Daniel are relating events of Daniel's history. Chapters 7-12 describe Daniel's prophecies, dreams and visions.

Apparently Daniel told what he saw while a scribe wrote it down, or he himself wrote it in the third person.

Daniel 7:2-3 - "Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another."

This was similar to the dream Nebuchadnezzar had (**Daniel 2**) concerning four world empires and the kingdom of Messiah which would supersede them. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream the kingdoms were part of a shining and glorious statue of a man. Daniel's own vision here is from God's point of view, and the kingdoms are depicted as wild, brute beasts.

Four winds = *rûah* - This could also be translated "spirits" - possibly God's angels. These four winds appear also in the Book of Revelation:

- **Revelation 7:1** - "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree."

"The great sea" - Probably the Mediterranean Sea, which all four kingdoms either touched or had some connection to. The sea generally often represents people or the nations.

- **Isaiah 57:20** - "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

The point is that God raised up these wicked nations for His own purposes.

These are the same kingdoms described earlier as different metals in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (**Daniel 2**).

Description of the Beasts

Daniel 7:4 - "The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it."

Jeremiah used the image of a lion and an eagle to represent Babylon:

- **Jeremiah 4:7** (NIV)- "A lion has come out of his lair; a destroyer of nations has set out. He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant."

(See also **Jeremiah 49:19-22**)

A winged lion was a symbol widely used by Babylon itself, representing strength and swiftness. You could say it was Babylon's "brand" or logo. You can see an example of these winged lions in the sections of the Ishtar Gate of Babylon which archaeologists have recovered. (We saw these at the Pergamon Museum in East Berlin in 1980),

But Daniel saw Babylon was "plucked," i.e. no longer swift and strong like a lion but weak and fearful as a single man as its vassals rebelled and its empire shrank.

Daniel 7:5 - "And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh."

This is the Medo-Persian empire, slower but massive, with one side "raised up" as the greater partner, which was Persia. The three ribs it is devouring are its conquests of Babylon, Lydia and Egypt.

Daniel 7:6 - "After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it."

The Greek (Macedonian) Alexander the Great struck like a leopard suddenly, and within 13 years had conquered the known world. At his death, his empire was divided between four successors his generals (the four heads).

The Fourth Beast with Ten Horns

Daniel 7:7 - "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse 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 little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things."

This beast with iron teeth corresponds to the last metal (iron) and last kingdom in

Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Rome.

In the ancient world, horns represented strength or glory. A beast with 10 horns would be exceedingly strong.

But the ten horns also correspond to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's dream image, made of iron mixed with clay, which the "stone cut without hands" strikes and destroys the entire statue. Later, the interpretation says the 10 toes are 10 kings.

Rashi - The angel explained to him that these are the ten kings who would ascend [the throne] of Rome before Vespasian, who would destroy the Temple.

The "little horn" speaking "great things" or "pompous words" many have identified in the New Testament as a type of the Anti-Christ. Thousands of books have been written attempting to identify this symbol, none very convincingly.

The rabbis explanation of the Little horn?

Rashi - That is Titus, about whom the Rabbis, of blessed memory, said (Gittin 56b) that he blasphemed and berated and entered the Heichal (the Holy of Holies in the Temple) with brazenness.

The Ancient of Days

Positioned between the description of four beasts and the interpretation of the dream, we find perhaps the most important image Daniel sees.

The vision is of the Ancient of Days (God the Father), and Jesus the Son of Man and his throne, surrounded by a host of angels and many more saints and believers worshipping Him.

Daniel 7:9-10 - "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened."

"till the thrones were cast down" is a bad translation. It should say, "till the thrones were established."

Who would sit on these thrones? It wasn't revealed to Daniel, because the church was a mystery hidden from Old Testament prophets. John tells us in **Revelation 4:4** that the 24 elders who represent the church will sit on these thrones.

"the books were opened" - probably the three books in Jewish tradition that are opened on Rosh Hashanah, most importantly the book of life.

- **Psalm 69:29** - "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, but not be written with the righteous"

- **Exodus 32:32** - "And if not, blot me, I pray You, out of Your book which you have written."

- **Revelation 20:15** - "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

- **Revelation 4:1-4** - "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold."

They wore crowns of victors (*stephanos*) rather than crowns of a ruler or sovereign (*diadem*). They were victors because they "endured to the end."

24 elders correspond to the 24 courses of priests who served in the Temple., and all believers ,who are called a royal priesthood.

- **1 Peter 2:9** - "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"

What do the precious stones represent?

Each Israelite tribe was represented by a precious stone set in the High Priest's breastplate (**Exodus 28**).

The Jasper and the sardine stone are the stones of the first born son Reuben and the last, Benjamin. The emerald, also mentioned, was the stone of Levi, whose members had special duties in ministering in the Tabernacle as priests and Levites.

Reuben means "behold, a son" and Benjamin means "son of my right hand" - both pointing to Christ.

- **Revelation 4:6-8** - "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

John sees a vision sort of like Daniel's. But instead of a sea representing humanity and four beasts rising out of it, we see a crystal sea of glass - probably the laver used for cleansing in the Temple, and four living beings (*zoon*) rather than four beasts (*therion*).

Instead of the sea casting up mire and muck, giving rise to four predatory beastly kingdoms, the "sea" or laver produces cleansing. The living beings pictured as a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle were the symbols on the banners of the Israelite tribes positioned at the cardinal points around the Tabernacle in the wilderness, according to rabbinical tradition. They represented all of God's people.

(Should Read the whole chapter, Revelation 4)

Daniel then witnesses God's victory over the "little horn" and the beast itself:

Daniel 7:11-12 - "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time."

'One Like the Son of Man'

Daniel 7:13-14 - "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Then "One like the Son of Man" - the same who was with the three companions in the fiery furnace and who shut the mouths of the lions - arrives with His eternal dominion surrounding Him.

Jewish interpreters understood this to refer to the Messiah:

The Zohar, In Gen. fol. 85. 4. - "In the times of the Messiah, Israel shall be one people, to the Lord, and he shall make them one nation in the earth, and they shall rule above and below; as it is written, "behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven"; this is the King Messiah of whom it is written, "and in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven, set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed"

In the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin, fol. 98. 1.) this prophecy is reconciled with another, concerning the Messiah, in **Zechariah 9:9**, to what R. Alexander said, R. Joshua ben Levi objects what is written, "and, behold, one like to the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven"; and it is written, "poor, and riding upon an ass": which is thus adjusted, "if they (the Israelites) are worthy, he (the Messiah) comes with the clouds of heaven; but if they are not worthy, he comes poor, and riding on an ass."

But Daniel was troubled by these visions, especially by the "little horn" and his opposition to God and His people, so he asked for the interpretation.

One of those standing by in his dream explained that the little horn would make war on the saints "and prevailed against them."

Daniel 7:25 - ".And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

Rashi - "until a time, two times, and half a time" - they are the 1,335 years stated at the end of the Book (**12:12**): 480 [years], which is the time from the Exodus from Egypt until the Temple was built, and 410 [years], [which are] the days of the First Temple, totaling 890, and another half of this time, 445, totaling 1,335.

- **Deuteronomy 31:18**: "And I, will hide My face" [the words] add up in gematria to 1,335.

As for the little horn...

Daniel 7:26-27 - "But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."

In effect, Daniel saw and felt the struggles of the church and believers throughout history, in a world where appearances portray a hopeless situation, but one in which eventually God brings about complete deliverance and victory.

Still, Daniel was so troubled and affected by the vision that he says, "my countenance changed in me", i.e. the color drained from his face, and "my thoughts troubled me greatly."

It was disturbing that the little horn "made war with the saints, and prevailed against them." He saw that things would get very dark before God's victory. In fact, Christians are still being persecuted all around the world. That should trouble all of us.

Perhaps Daniel somehow sensed that the final victory would require a heavy sacrifice on a cross on Calvary.

See Through

The specifics of how this vision of Daniel is related to current and future events is beyond our interpretive abilities.

But the essence of the Little Horn is evident.

The antichrist is said to be a man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." (**2 Thessalonians 2:3-4**)

We don't know his identity or when he will be revealed, but we know that his spirit has gone out into the world already, and continually tries to "wear down" and grind under the saints.

- **1 John 4:3** - "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God; and such is the spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already it is in the world."

The spirit of antichrist speaks discouragement and doubt using our own thoughts, causing us to doubt Jesus has indeed come and lives within us. So in effect, we each become the antichrist in those situations.

Remember that antichrist sits in the Temple of God.

- **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** - "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

The antichrist sits in the Temple of our consciousness, exalting his ideas and thoughts over God's truth. Our response -

- **2 Corinthians 13:5** - "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

The scriptures enjoin us to look beyond the wickedness of the beastly oppressions, temptations and persecutions of the powers that be.

We are to "see through" to that central image embedded within Daniel's vision, of the Ancient of Days, and the One Like the Son of God, who is the victor and receives the worship and praise of his children in His everlasting kingdom, destined to overthrow and judge every evil deed.

Paul says we "seated in heavenly places" right now (**Ephesians 2:6**). We're part of that vast throng of believers worshipping before the heavenly throne. How do we make that part of our present experience?

We "see through" to that outside-of-time gathering before the throne of God and join in!

Are you being "worn down" by anxiety, by depression, by loneliness?

See through!

Are you burdened by regret, struggling with a feeling of emptiness or despair?

See through!

We may never completely understand the meanings of all the details of Daniel's visions. But if we can see through to the throne room of God, we can experience eternity in the here and now.