

The Vision's Interpretation

Daniel 7:15-22

Introduction

In the first and third years of Belshazzar's reign in Babylon Daniel receives two visions of the future Gentile world powers. In the first part of chapter seven (vv.1-14) Daniel is given information concerning four beasts (vv.1-8) and two supernatural beings (vv.9-14). The first being is God Himself; the Ancient of Days seated on His heavenly throne judging the earth. A river of fire flows from God's presence and millions of angels minister to Him (v.10). Millions and millions await judgment and the fourth beast is cast into hell (vv.11-12). Another being—the Son of Man is given a glorious, eternal kingdom. Now Daniel asks for the interpretation and it is given by an angelic being near him.

The Rise Of Four Kingdoms (vv.15-17)

Daniel 7:15–17 (NKJV) 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.

What was the immediate response of Daniel from the visions? Daniel tells us. He is anxious and alarmed. Why?

We know in part. Daniel sees the future. It is a future where the world experiences judgment as a result of sin. This grieves Daniel. Later Daniel will write; “*As for me, Daniel my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart*” (v.28)—the color drained from Daniel's face.

Daniel is in distress (v.15). He approaches the celestial being and confesses his inability to process what he sees (v.16).

We see this pattern repeated over and over again in the Scripture. When someone receives a vision from God it is usually terrifying. Genesis chapter 20 records the sad sojourn of Abraham in Gerar. Abraham begs Sarah to tell the king she is his sister and his lie puts the whole prophetic plan at risk. The Lord appears to Abimelech in a dream and the first words from God's mouth are “Indeed you are a dead man because the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife”. Nebuchadnezzar was “troubled, and his sleep left him” (Daniel 2:1).

Daniel had interpreted the dreams of others and was genuinely gifted at discerning the meaning but was wholly at a loss to process his own vision. In the vision he makes inquiry of a being standing by (v.16).

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We need to ask ourselves this question; "Why does Daniel want to know the truth about the vision?" Think about what is going on in the vision. He wants to know the meaning of the fourth beast and the little horn. His attention is not focused on the first three creatures but rather this final creature. Why is this beast so ferocious and cruel? Daniel wants to know more about the ten horns, why three fall and why the small horn grows greater and speaks with such arrogance?

We are not given the angelic being's name but some of have suggested it may have been Gabriel who plays a prominent role in both the interpretation of future visions and the announcements that will take place at the coming of the Messiah. In Daniel 8:16 Gabriel is instructed "*make this man understand the vision.*" And later Daniel writes; "While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice" (9:1).

It is Gabriel who announces to Zechariah the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary (Luke 11:11-17; 26-38).

The beasts are four human kingdoms (v.17).

We have in brief already introduced these kingdoms.

A nation like a lion with eagles wings was Babylon (v.4).

A nation like a bear was Medo-Persia (v.5).

A nation like a leopard was Greece (v.6).

A nation exceeding strong was the Roman Empire (v.7).

The kingdoms have notable leaders; Nebuchadnezzar; Cyrus; Alexander The Great and the one Daniel called "the little horn" (the antichrist).

How do these kingdoms correspond to some contemporary kingdoms or future kingdoms?
Are we to believe these kingdoms are all past with one future?

What do all of them have in common? They are violent and corrupt. The kingdoms come and go. They bring sorrow, pain and suffering, insecurity and distress chaos and turmoil.

The Replacement By A Forever Kingdom (v.18)

18But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.'

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There are in fact five kingdoms. Four human one divine. Four temporary One forever.

Once again Daniel is given hope. Kingdoms will come and go. Conquest and cruelty will come and go. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom.

A kingdom is on the horizon. A glorious kingdom. An eternal kingdom. In this single sentence Daniel knows that God will prevail. Israel has a bright future and a wonderful hope. True believers within Israel will see the coming of the Messiah and serve Him forever.

The kingdom is universal. The kingdom is mentioned some 70 times in the New Testament. The kingdom includes everything seen and unseen; material as well as spiritual. The kingdom was announced at Christ's birth and will be set up at His return (Revelation 12:10). Angels are a part of God's Kingdom and Satan and demons are answerable to it. Men are to seek the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Believers enter it upon the New Birth—and the unsaved cannot see it (John 3:3;5). **The kingdom is characterized by righteousness, peace and joy (Romans 14:17) and cannot be inherited by flesh and blood (1 Corinthians 15:50).**

Who are the saints of the Most High?

The word translated saints mean holy people or the ones who are set apart. The implication is these are ones who are set apart from sin and set apart to God—the Most High.

These are not people who are intrinsically holy (see Ron Rhodes p.189) but rather made holy as a result of trusting Christ. More specifically these are the ones who have trusted that God's Messiah. Some scholars argue it is a reference to all God's people in every age. Others suggest it is a reference to the church. Still others suggest it is a reference to believing Jews. Some scholars argue that Daniel deals with the Jewish people and the Church does not even come into existence until the New Testament dispensation.

What makes most sense? Who are the recipient's of future kingdom? An argument can be made that all the saints will one day inherit the future kingdom. But the immediate context seems to reference Jews—Jews who are redeemed in the end times.

Ron Rhodes points out that the Armageddon seems to be the historical (future) context in which Israel experiences a major conversion event (Zechariah 12:2-13:1). He writes:

In terms of chronology, Israel's future restoration will include the confession of Israel's national sin (Leviticus 26:40-42; Jeremiah 3:11-18; Hosea 5:15), and then the remnant of the Jews will be saved, thereby fulfilling Paul's prophecy of Israel in Romans 11:25-27. In dire threat from the antichrist at Armageddon, Israel will plead for their newly found Messiah to return and deliver them (they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child—Zechariah 12:10; see also Isaiah 53:1-9; Matthew 23:37-39), at which point their deliverance will surely come (see Romans 10:13-14).

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He goes on to suggest that Israel's leaders will finally realize why tribulation has fallen on them; either from the Holy Spirit's enlightenment, understanding of the Scripture or the preaching of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists or the testimony of the two (Jewish) prophetic witnesses. The redeemed Jews enter Christ's millennial kingdom; where the promises for Abraham and Joshua and David are finally fulfilled (see *40 Days Through Daniel*; p.190).

The Revelation Of The Fourth Beast (vv.19-22)

19 "Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet;
20 and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows.
21 "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them,
22 until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.

The fourth beast was substantially different than its predecessors. All the kingdoms were marked by conquest and cruelty but the fourth kingdom exceeded all the previous empires. Daniel desires more information and more information is disclosed.

The physical description is repeated. The ten horns are on the beast's head. One emerges; three fall; the horn with eyes and mouth speaks pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows.

This horn grows in significance and eclipses in glory and power and strength the remaining horns. He makes war against the saints and prevails against them.

The antichrist is able to persecute and prevail against believing Jews and Gentiles for a season.

This future antichrist is called many things in the Bible. He is called the Assyrian (Isaiah 14:25); the prince who will come (Daniel 9:26); the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3); and a king with fierce countenance (Daniel 8:23). A vile person (Daniel 11:21) and a willful king (Daniel 11:36); the wicked or lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:8); beast (Revelation 13:1).

The antichrist arises from obscurity to a position of great authority.

The questions that Daniel has about the bizarre vision still require further explanation.

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And the angel will provide in part the answer. The fourth beast is different from the other beasts; in power, terror, unity and organization. It will devour the whole earth.

The Roman Empire never conquered the whole earth. Julius Caesar took a crack at it. Augustus expanded it. Hadrian crept even further. But Rome never subdued the whole world. Rome's territory stretched from England in the Atlantic to the Euphrates River. It stretched from Gaul to the shores of North Africa. But Rome failed to subdue the Scots, the Gauls, the Parthians and the Scythian tribes north of the Black Sea. The Romans were held at the Caucasus mountains or subdued Armenia or penetrated beyond the deserts of the Sahara.

Daniel sees the antichrist prevailing against the saints.

Daniel sees the Ancient of Days come; and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High. And what was that judgment? **The little horn's kingdom comes to a crashing halt. And the Kingdom of the Most High remains forever. The saints possess the kingdom.**

I want to draw your attention to that most glorious phrase; "and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom" (vv.18;22). In Matthew's gospel we read about the kingdom of heaven some 30 times. The kingdom of God is mentioned some 5 times. Some regard the phrase as identical because of similarities. Both are established on the earth; both are associated with mysteries; Christ associates the parable of the leaven with both. However there are some distinctions:

1. The kingdom of God is entered only by the new birth (John 3:3;5).
2. The kingdom of God is eternal (Daniel 4:2,3; Hebrews 1:8).
3. Only the saved are in the Kingdom of God where they are safe (John 5:24; 10:28-29).

The unsaved are briefly found in the Kingdom of Heaven where they are judged and cast out (Matthew 13:41-43).

What are we to make of all of this? I think it's safe to say that the Kingdom of Heaven is that place where God rules—or the rule of heaven over earth by Christ when He establishes His kingdom on the earth. While the kingdom of God is that place where God's sovereign rule takes place in both the universe and the human heart.

Later in our next study Daniel will be given three facts about this future fourth beast. The beast will devour the whole earth—it will be a global empire (vv.23-24). It will defy the Most High (v. 25). It will be destroyed by the most High (vv.26-27). And the vision terrifies Daniel (v.28).

Conclusion