

Daniel Chapter Seven

This chapter begins the *second* half of the book of Daniel which comprises four visions unfolding Divine dealings with Israel during the times of the Gentiles. The emphasis thus falls on *prophecy* rather than *history*, and the nation of *Israel* (hence the shift back to Hebrew in Daniel 8) rather than the *nations*. This chapter, however, acts as a transition between the two sections, dealing with 'the emergence of a final world power *politically*, and the emergence of a final world ruler *personally*. Since this will be a Gentile empire – with a Gentile ruler – the language is Aramaic' (Allen). Furthermore, the chapter is panoramic; the individual features being dealt with in succeeding chapters.



Daniel 7 (four **monsters**) restates the truth of Daniel 2 (four **metals**) from a Divine perspective. *Kelly: They go over the same ground precisely, but in a different way. The earlier of the two gives the public history of the world as made known to the first man whom the God of heaven made monarch of all mankind, as well as of the lower creation (Daniel 2.37-38); in the later (Daniel 7) we have a presentation of it to a saint, and details in relation to the Lord and the saints at the end of the age.* The outward political appearance of these earthly kingdoms (Daniel 2) is now contrasted with their inward moral and spiritual features – they are wild, vicious, violent and destructive. The apparent repetition of the general details in Daniel 2 and 7 only serve to emphasise the importance of the prophecy (see Genesis 41.32), as well as complementing one another with many additional details. The encouraging overall theme of Daniel 7 is the sovereign power and authority of the Ancient of Days, who gives dominion to whomsoever He will. These four great empires will come and go, but ultimate and everlasting dominion belongs to the Son of Man and the kingdom of God (vv.9-14).

The four kings (and kingdoms) represented in the 'great beasts' are commonly and historically interpreted as successive world kingdoms (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome), culminating in the fearful, universal kingdom of Antichrist in the tribulation. This opinion prevailed in the Christian church until the 1800s when 'higher criticism' denied the divine inspiration of Scripture and sought to provide a rational explanation for such clear prophecy (including a later date for the writing of the book). Martin Luther even wrote, 'all the world is agreed, and history and fact abundantly establish it.' This will be the interpretation followed in these notes. In recent years, some highly esteemed brethren have taught that the beasts represent future, contemporaneous kingdoms (or kings) in existence during the tribulation – whether a recovery of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece alongside the kingdom of Antichrist, or as representing an alliance of Great Britain (lion) and the USA (eagle), with Russia (bear) and China (leopard). For more see the writings of *GH Lang*, *Sir Robert Anderson*, *Geoffrey R King*, *Norman Mellish* (The Times of the Gentiles) and *Jim Allen* (Daniel Reconsidered).

The Context of the Chapter [v.1]

v.1: The remaining chapters of Daniel are not chronological. Belshazzar's first year was 553BC, Daniel being approximately 70 years of age. Historically, the vision thus fits between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. Nebuchadnezzar had died nine years previous, giving rise to a number of years of political unrest and decline until Nabonidus (Belshazzar's father) assumed the throne in 556BC. Daniel has been an interpreter of dreams, now he becomes the recipient of four visions (7.1; 8.1; 9.23; 10.1). These last six chapters are thus written in the *first* rather than the *third* person. Daniel had a 'dream' (*singular*, expressing unity), seeing 'visions' (*plural*, stages of revelation), whilst he was asleep, of the great sea on earth (vv.1-8) and the throne in heaven (vv.9-14). Note. Whilst the revelation first affected his 'head' it later worked down to his 'heart' (v.28). Prophecy is not merely to satisfy curiosity, but to stir and soften the heart (Bell).

The Coming of Four Great Beasts [vv.2-7]

v.2: 'I saw' (used nine times in the chapter) should be translated 'I was looking' as if his attention is gripped by the unfolding scene. Daniel saw the 'four winds' of heaven 'breaking forth' and agitating the 'great sea' – a possible reference to the Mediterranean (Numbers 34.6-7; Ezekiel 47.10, 15) – which had a close geographical link to the four world empires presented in the chapter. In Scripture, the sea often represents the mass of humanity or Gentile nations (Isaiah 17.12-13; 57.20; Revelation 17.15). The 'winds' are symbolic of the sovereign power of God striving with men (Revelation 7.1). The symbolism therefore seems to illustrate the universal turmoil and upheaval of human history, nations in chaos, from which God providentially causes four great Gentile empires to rise. **v.3:** The word 'great' describes the huge size of these animal-like monstrosities. Each beast represents a Gentile kingdom personified in their king (cp. v.17, 23). They all have the same earthly *origin* out of the sea (cf. v.17), but emerge successively, not together

(cp. vv.6-7). As noted above, 'beasts' represent the wild, vicious character of such kingdoms. What a contrast to Christ who is represented by the gentle *dove*, lowly *lamb*, down-trodden *worm* and insignificant *hen* (Paisley).

v.4: The first beast was 'like a lion' with 'eagle's wings', an apt symbol of **Babylon**. Both Jeremiah (4.7, 13; 49.19, 22; 50.17) and Ezekiel (17.3, 7), contemporaries of Daniel, use the lion and eagle as pictures of the powerful and swift military might of Babylon. Even the famous processional way from the Ishtar gate through the centre of Babylon was embellished with winged lions. As the lion is the king of beasts and eagle the king of birds, so Nebuchadnezzar had absolute and complete authority. The 'plucking' or 'pulling out' of its wings symbolise the restriction of Babylon's conquests and possibly Nebuchadnezzar's humbling before God as a beast of the field (Daniel 4). Yet he was 'lifted up from the earth' and his humanity (sanity) restored when he gave God the glory. A man's 'heart' may have reference to Nebuchadnezzar's latter humanitarian interest rather than a beastly lust for power. God transforms lions!

v.5: The second beast was 'like to a bear', a ferocious animal of formidable strength (Isaiah 13.17-18). The emphasis may be the animal's voracious appetite – a good picture of **Medo-Persia** and her insatiable hunger for conflict – hence the apparent decree from heaven to 'arise, devour much flesh'. The bear (or perhaps a paw) was 'lifted' or 'raised up' on one side indicating the dominance of Persia within the empire. This is illustrated again by the unequal ram's horns in Daniel 8.3. The 'three ribs' in the mouth correspond perfectly to the three major conquests of the empire under the leadership of Cyrus and Cambyses (i.e. Lydia, Babylon and Egypt). **v.6:** The third beast was 'like a leopard' which is noted in Scripture for its swiftness, cunning and agility (Habakkuk 1.8; Jeremiah 5.6; Hosea 13.7). Its 'four wings of a fowl' upon its back indicate a swiftness beyond its natural capacity which well illustrates the **Greek** empire and the lightning speed with which Alexander conquered the known world. *Allen: Backed by an original army of under fifty thousand Macedonian warriors, he brought the world to his feet in eight years (331–323 BC).* The 'four heads' indicate the governmental divisions into which the empire was split after the death of Alexander (Daniel 8.8, 21-22). Again, the sovereign hand of God is evident in the dominion which was 'given' to the empire.

v.7: The fourth beast cannot be likened to any particular animal – it is plain *different* (cf. v.19, 23). Whilst it likely represents the **Roman** empire, the world power at the time of the Lord Jesus, these verses clearly emphasise the future and final form of this fourth empire during the tribulation. The beast is described as 'dreadful' (awesome) and 'terrible' (frightful) with great strength. It 'devoured' and 'crushed' its enemies with 'iron teeth' (cf. 2.33-35) and 'nails' (or claws) of 'brass' (v.19), reminiscent of Rome's ruthless destruction of civilizations and peoples. Anything that remained was trampled underfoot. Daniel sees the first three beasts 'standing before' (preposition of *space*) the fourth, which magnifies its 'diversity' as a beast satanically energised (cf. Revelation 13.2). The 'ten horns' represent ten kings (v.24; cf. Revelation 13.1) to which the historical Roman empire has no parallel, whether ten discrete kingdoms or ten united kings under Caesar. This beast is further described in Revelation 13 (vv.1-8) as displaying the features of a leopard, bear and lion suggesting it will gather into its power the *combined* characteristics of past world kingdoms.

The Character of the Little Horn [v.8]

v.8: As Daniel contemplates the horns, a 'little horn' catches his attention. This 'little horn' is the ruler of the final world empire – the *first* beast of Revelation 13 (cp. vv.5-7), the 'man of sin' (2 Thessalonians 2.3) and coming 'prince' (9.26).

- **Power.** He has an insignificant beginning, rising from virtual obscurity to 'root up' three contemporaries. His political genius pushes him to prominence without upheaval or revolution. These three 'horns' are described as 'falling' (in worship) before the 'little horn' (v.20) and being 'subdued' (humbled), v.24. He began 'little' but soon became more formidable (stout), or higher in rank than all others (v.20).
- **Perceptive.** The 'eyes' of the horn express intelligence and insight beyond expectation – a very clever individual.
- **Pride.** He will be a persuasive orator speaking 'great' (boastful) things, including blasphemies against the 'Most High' – His name, His tabernacle and them that dwell in heaven (v.25, cf. Revelation 13.6).
- **Persecution.** He is bent on persecuting or continually 'harassing' (to 'wear out') the saints with a view to their utter annihilation (v.25, cp. Revelation 13.7). Without the mark of the beast, no saint will be able to buy or sell and ultimately be sentenced to death (Revelation 13.15-17). Part of this oppression comes through his seeking to change 'times and laws' (v.25), probably an attempt to rid society of every vestige of religion (cf. 9.27). Such persecution is allowed by God for three and a half years, during the great tribulation (v.25, Revelation 12.13-17).
- **Prospects.** Despite the obvious satanically induced power and influence of this man, Daniel 7 significantly uses the word 'until' on three occasions (cf. vv.9, 11, 22). The Ancient of Days has total and absolute sovereign control. This man's slaying at Armageddon, and ultimate destiny in the lake of fire is assured (v.11; Revelation 19.19-21).

The Court of Heaven [vv.9-12]

v.9: In verses which closely correspond to the heavenly throne room scene of Revelation 4-5, the reader is reminded that God remains in absolute and sovereign control – the circumstances of earth may be *fearful*, but God's people should not be *frantic*! 'I beheld' introduces an abrupt change in the Aramaic, with vv.9-10 and vv.13-14 being poetic in form. The heavenly scene shows thrones being 'cast down', i.e. set in place (established). This is the High Court of Heaven (cf. Revelation 4.4; 20.4). Attention is drawn to one particular throne upon which the 'Ancient of Days' is seated. This title is unique to Daniel 7 and suggests the *dignity of eternity*. This constant Person is unchanged by days. He existed long *before* 'a space was cleared on the plain of history' for any of the 'beastly' kingdoms and will continue long *after* they have been destroyed (DR Davis). His garment 'white as snow' suggests purity and holiness, whilst mature and righteous judgment is indicated by hair like 'pure wool'. His throne 'was ablaze with fire' and its wheels were 'all aflame' (NET), Ezekiel 1.13-21. Fire is a symbol of the presence of deity (Genesis 15.17; Exodus 3.2; 19.18), and righteous judgment of God (Psalm 97.1-3). This throne is situated on wheels (as a chariot) and signifies the activity of Divine purpose which has no geographical limits. **v.10:** A 'fiery stream' is depicted as flowing out from the throne administering the righteous judgment of God upon the wicked (Psalm 97.3). Around the throne are a myriad of angelic beings, worshipfully serving the Ancient of Days (cp. Revelation 5.11). The language of 'thousand thousands' does not signify an exact number – 'earth's numbering system is inadequate to calculate the numbers involved' (Allen). All is set in order for the case to be heard – the court is seated, and the evidence presented in the form of written records of deeds, words and thoughts (Revelation 20.12; Matthew 12.36; Ezekiel 11.5).

v.11: The return to prose signals Daniel's attention shifting towards earth, rather than heaven. Whilst v.13 follows v.10 chronologically, vv.11-12 are explanatory. The literary sandwich seems calculated to squeeze the 'little horn' between the Ancient of Days (vv.9-10) and Son of Man (vv.13-14). *The Bible is trying to thrill you by placarding where the power and glory, justice and kingship really reside* (DR Davis). Daniel keenly awaits the response of heaven to the blasphemous words of the 'horn'. Inevitably, the righteous justice of God demands the 'beast' (representing both the empire and its leader) to be 'slain', and his 'body destroyed' (to perish) as it is given to the flame of the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 19.20). Daniel is thus observing the events of the end of the Great Tribulation when the Man of Sin and his empire is destroyed at Armageddon (Revelation 19.19, 21). **v.12:** The other world Gentile empires do not escape the judgment of God's throne, but with this difference, their 'dominion' is simply 'taken away' and their lives were 'prolonged for a season and a time'. This is not a chronological sequence, but a summary of God's judgment. The other beasts (i.e. Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece, as well as the historical Roman empire) had their 'ruling authority' removed, and yet their peoples and culture were, to some degree, absorbed into the conquering kingdom – in this way their 'lives were prolonged' for a season. For example, the Roman empire commonly spoke Greek and embraced the pantheon of Greek gods (though under different names). Thus, the character of each beast (empire) is absorbed in the next for a 'season' (*character* of the period) and 'time' (*chronology* of the period), i.e. the times of the Gentiles. Note, then, the contrast between the slow disintegration of the 'rest' of the empires (beasts) and the immediate total destruction of the fourth beast – which will result in a completely new condition on earth – the reign of the Son of Man!

The Coronation of the King [vv.13-14]

v.13: The 'Ancient of Days' (Father) is clearly distinguished from the 'Son of man' who is presented as the approved Sovereign before the throne of Heaven. He will receive the universal kingdom as a gift from His Father (Psalm 2.6-9). The title 'Son of man' emphasises the true and total identification of the eternal Son of God with mankind – both as their Saviour (Luke 19.10) and Judge (John 5.22). He is man as man should be. Christ referred to Himself as 'Son of man' 77 times, often in reference to His second coming to earth (Matthew 16.27-28; 24.27, 30) – and clearly drawing attention to Himself as the God-ordained Sovereign of Daniel 7. His coming 'with' or 'upon' (LXX) the 'clouds of heaven' implies His deity, as well as His imminent return to earth (cf. Acts 1.9; 1 Thessalonians 4.17; Revelation 1.7). **v.14:** Worldwide 'dominion' is withdrawn from failing men and entrusted to a Man who cannot fail. Christ has long been dishonoured and despised, but universal 'glory' (honour) will be His (Zechariah 6.13). He will preside over the administration of a literal, earthly and eternal 'kingdom'. Whilst this kingdom has a one thousand-year (millennial) phase, it is a prelude to eternity (cf. v.18, 'to forever and to the forever of forever'). All people, nations and languages will 'serve' (reverence) Him (Zechariah 14.16).

The Concern of Daniel [vv.15-16]

v.15: The visions caused Daniel great 'trouble' (sudden fear and amazement) and 'grieved' his whole being. **v.16:** Consequently, he seeks clarification of the 'certainty' (truth) of these things from 'one of them that stood by' (the throne), possibly an angelic being such as Gabriel (8.16; 9.21). As Daniel sought *general* (v.16) and *specific* (vv.19-22) clarification, so he is given a *concise* (vv.17-18) then *expanded* interpretation (vv.23-27).

The Communication of the Angel [vv.17-18]

v.17: Generally speaking, the 'great beasts' are 'four kings' – which clearly *represent* and *personify* the kingdoms over which they rule (v.23). The fact these kingdoms 'shall arise' (imperfect) does not eliminate Babylon or prove they are all future. Daniel is merely watching a vision unfold before him, which contemplates the four empires as an incomplete historical unit until the final empire is destroyed. Arising out of the 'earth' (rather than the 'sea', v.3) emphasises character – they are *earthly* rather than *heavenly* in origin. **v.18:** But the everlasting kingdom shall be 'received' (in association with Christ) by the 'saints' (holy ones) – a word which can refer to angels (Psalm 89.5; Daniel 4.13, 23) and the people of Israel in general (Exodus 19.6; Psalm 34.9). The reference is probably to the remnant of Israel delivered out from the nations and a remnant from the Gentiles, i.e. the 'sheep' (Matthew 25.34).

The Concern of Daniel [vv.19-22]

v.19: More specifically, Daniel sought further explanation of the fourth beast. Most of the statements of vv.19-21 have been considered in the notes on vv.7-8. Again, Daniel mentions its *appearance* (dreadful), *appetite* (devoured), *activity* (brake and stamped), *authority* (more 'stout') and *animosity* (made war). These matters were clearly troubling the prophet. **v.22:** The word 'until' once again declares divine sovereignty – the saints are persecuted until the Ancient of Days gives 'judgment' in their favour. They are found worthy of kingdom blessing (Matthew 25.21).

The Communication of the Angel [vv.23-27]

v.23: The final phase of the 'fourth kingdom' will be worldwide – assimilating nations and kingdoms under its dominion. **v.24:** Initially the kingdom will be a ten-king confederacy, after which another king, different and greater in power and intelligence will arise and 'subdue' (humiliate) three of these kings, to take a position of prominence and power in the kingdom. **v.25:** As explained above (see v.8), he will open his mouth in blasphemy against God, and 'wear out' (persecute) the saints, seeking to tear them to shreds as an old garment. His oppression of God's people is allowed for 'a time and times and the dividing of time' which equates to 3.5 years (cp. 4.16). This is a highly significant period of time, referred to in the book of Revelation as 42 months (11.2; 13.5), 1260 days (11.3; 12.6) and a time, times and half a time (12.14). The particular period here refers to the second half of the Tribulation which begins when the beast abolishes the sacrificial offerings and worship of the Jews in Jerusalem (cf. Daniel 9.27). It is this changing of 'times and laws' which also signifies the beginning of severe persecution against Israel (Revelation 12.13-17). It seems that religious freedom will be abolished as he attempts to dictate a whole new system of festivals (times) and moral or religious regulations (laws) to facilitate the worship of himself. There is no doubt the devil is already seeking to overturn divine principles which have been established since the beginning of time. **v.26:** Nevertheless, the heavenly court will convene and pronounce a sentence of destruction upon the beast. His rule and kingdom (dominion) will be taken away, even completely destroyed forever. **v.27:** In contrast, the 'greatness' (majesty, cf. 5.18) of the everlasting kingdom will be given to the saints in association with the Sovereign. Whilst they rule with Him, they also submit to 'serve and obey' Him as the Supreme Sovereign over all (Allen).

The Cogitations of the Prophet [v.28]

v.28: It is perhaps the angelic interpreter who declares the 'end of the matter' (v.16). The final outcome for earth, as seen in this vision, is the glorious, everlasting kingdom of the Son of man. Unsurprisingly, all Daniel had seen and heard caused him 'alarm' (shock) and perplexity. Whilst there was much in the vision that was sweet, the rise and fall of kingdoms, persecution of the saints and fire of divine wrath must have been bitter (cf. Revelation 10.9-10). Whilst Nebuchadnezzar's face was flushed with anger (3.19) and Belshazzar's face white with fear (5.6), Daniel was pale with godly distress. No wonder he made the vision an object of care, pondering such matters attentively in his heart.