

# God on His Throne

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

Daniel 7:1-28

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September 27, 2020

There are only five weeks until the presidential election. As I listen to the news and watch my Facebook feed, it's clear people have concerns about the direction of our nation (on the left and the right). People are questioning the quality of our leaders and their qualifications. Do you have concerns about the direction of our nation? Many of the concerns of Christians are centered around how politics affects our lives as believers. And how the things we believe and value might be threatened.

We're told we're living in unprecedented times. And it certainly feels like that. But was it different in Daniel's day? Surely he also had concerns about the direction of the nation of Babylon. And wondered about the implications for the people of God.

Our text this morning is Daniel 7. We're done with the stories of Daniel and his friends. The rest of the book is full of apocalyptic visions. And this is the first vision. Up to this point, Daniel's been involved in interpreting the visions of others. But now, he receives a vision of his own. And he needs help interpreting it.

This vision comes in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon. Daniel would've certainly questioned the quality and qualifications of this leader. As Jordan showed us a couple weeks ago, Belshazzar is incompetent at best. Remember when he was throwing a party while the Medo-Persian army laid siege to Babylon. Belshazzar is defiant in the face of an imminent threat. He's going to tank the nation. But not only that. He defies the living God. He's a wicked man.

What will this mean for Babylon? And what will it mean for the people of God? We know from chapter 9 that Daniel's been studying Jeremiah. So, he knows Israel's captivity is ending. But when he sees Belshazzar in charge, he's got to be wondering how everything's going to shake out.

So, God gives him a vision. But it's interesting. The vision doesn't tell Daniel what to do to combat the kingdom of man. Instead it tells him what is true—what's true about the nations in the world, what's true about God, and what that means for the people of God.

## **Daniel 7:1-28**<sup>1</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. <sup>2</sup>Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. <sup>3</sup>And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. <sup>4</sup>The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. <sup>5</sup>And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' <sup>6</sup>After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. <sup>7</sup>After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. <sup>8</sup>I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little*

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

<sup>9</sup>“As I looked,

thrones were placed,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;  
his clothing was white as snow,  
and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
his throne was fiery flames;  
its wheels were burning fire.

<sup>10</sup>A stream of fire issued  
and came out from before him;  
a thousand thousands served him,  
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;  
the court sat in judgment,  
and the books were opened.

<sup>11</sup>“I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. <sup>12</sup>As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

<sup>13</sup>“I saw in the night visions,

and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.

<sup>14</sup>And 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 one  
that shall not be destroyed.

<sup>15</sup>“As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. <sup>16</sup>I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. <sup>17</sup>These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup>But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’

<sup>19</sup>“Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, <sup>20</sup>and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. <sup>21</sup>As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, <sup>22</sup>until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

<sup>23</sup>“Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast,

*there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth,  
which shall be different from all the kingdoms,  
and it shall devour the whole earth,  
and trample it down, and break it to pieces.*

<sup>24</sup>*As for the ten horns,  
out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise,  
and another shall arise after them;  
he shall be different from the former ones,  
and shall put down three kings.*

<sup>25</sup>*He shall speak words against the Most High,  
and shall wear out the saints of the Most High,  
and shall think to change the times and the law;  
and they shall be given into his hand  
for a time, times, and half a time.*

<sup>26</sup>*But the court shall sit in judgment,  
and his dominion shall be taken away,  
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.*

<sup>27</sup>*And the kingdom and the dominion  
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven  
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;  
their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,  
and all dominions shall serve and obey them.'*

<sup>28</sup>*"Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart."*

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into two parts. There's a vision in verses 1-14, that comes to us in two sections. Then there's an interpretation of the vision by an angel in verses 15-28. I'm going to follow the two parts of the vision sequentially. And I'll draw in the relevant verses from the interpretation as I go.

## **TERRIFYING KINGDOMS (1-8)**

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The first part of the vision deals with the kingdoms of the world. And this is what we learn about them. The world's kingdoms are marked by evil and they're temporary.<sup>2</sup> To draw this out, I want to start with the vision. Then I'll move to the interpretation to show the significance of the vision.

### *The Vision*

The picture in verses 1-8 is terrifying. We're given a vision of four great beasts which arise out of the sea (cf. Rev. 13:1). In the Bible, the sea is a place of chaos, where evil rules, and where those who do evil emerge.<sup>3</sup> Evil monsters, like Leviathan, live in the sea. So, the picture isn't pleasant. It's an ominous picture of rough waters and waves crashing. The sharks are circling. Godzilla emerges. The Kraken has sounded his alarm.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ligon Duncan, "[The Dream of the Four Beasts](#)"

<sup>3</sup> David Helm, *Daniel for You*

Notice the beasts in this vision are not natural. The lion also has eagle's wings (v. 4). The bear has a hunchback and is chewing on the bones of its victim, as its master commands him to sic! "Arise, devour much flesh" (v. 5). And the leopard has four wings and four heads (v. 6). This is stuff out of a science fiction movie. Really, it's a horror movie. It's meant to terrify.

The fourth beast is unlike the others. It can't even be described with a known animal. It was "terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet" (v. 7).

### *The Interpretation*

In the interpretation section, we're told twice, once at the beginning and again at the end, that this terrifying vision alarmed Daniel (vv. 15, 28). Why was he alarmed?

To answer that question, we should probably first identify who these beasts represent. We're told explicitly in verse 17 that they "are four kings who shall arise out of the earth." They represent four kingdoms, the same four kingdoms we encountered in chapter 2.

The lion with eagle's wings certainly refers to Babylon. In Jeremiah and Ezekiel we're told explicitly that Babylon is represented as a lion and an eagle. The bear likely refers to the Medo-Persian Empire. Its raised back represents Persia. The leopard with four heads likely represents Greece and the four subsequent provinces that emerged after Alexander the Great. Therefore, the fourth beast is likely the Roman Empire.

But the fourth beast also has ten horns. Verse 24 tells us that out of the fourth kingdom ten kings would arise. This may be literal, but I believe it's more likely to be symbolic. Ten is the number of fullness in the Bible. And I think it probably refers to the fullness of kingdoms between the Roman Empire and the end of time.

One reason I think this, is because the little horn that rises out of the fourth beast is thought by many commentators to represent the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2 or the antichrist in 1 John. In verse 25, we read that the little horn will speak words against the Most High. We see the beast in Revelation 13 doing the same (vv. 5-6). So, if the little horn refers to the antichrist, then the ten kingdoms represent all the human kingdoms who are positioned against God and his people until the end of time.

But we can't dwell on the details of the vision and end up missing the forest for the trees. The details are hard to understand, but the big picture is clear. Regardless of the details, we're meant to see that the nations of this world are raging against God. They have apparent power and obvious evil.

And why is this alarming to Daniel? These beasts devour (cf. v. 19). But more specifically, they oppose the people of God. Verse 21 says the little horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them. Verse 25 says, "He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time."

Daniel's alarmed because these beasts will violently oppose the people of God.

Friends, we need to have a realistic picture of the world. It is a scary place. It can be terrifying. Sure, Daniel knew of the promise of the end of the exile. But even after the return of the exiles, there

would be much suffering and much opposition. This is the lot for the people of God all the way till the end of time. And we're not going to change that.

But this is only part of the picture. The second part of the vision begins in verse 9, with a quite different picture from the horror movie of verses 1-8.

## **THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD (9-14)**

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In verse 9, we move from the sea to the throne room of God. It's a scene of complete contrast. The kingdoms of this earth are like the creatures in the great children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, who "roar their terrible roars and gnash their terrible teeth and roll their terrible eyes and show their terrible claws." But God says to the roaring sea and its creatures, "Be still!"

While the kingdoms of this earth are terrifying, there's no need to be anxious. While it may be fearful, there's no need to be frantic. Life in this world is painful, but God's people don't need to panic.<sup>4</sup>

This scene teaches us that God's kingdom is marked by righteous judgment and is everlasting. We see this in the vision of the Ancient of Days and the vision of the Son of Man.

### *The Vision of the Ancient of Days*

God's described as the Ancient of Days. Whereas the kingdoms of this earth rise and fall, God was on his throne before any of the kings of this earth were. And he'll be on his throne when they all fall. As we've learned throughout Daniel, the rise and fall of kingdoms are entirely in God's hand. In fact, it's the winds of *heaven* that are stirring up the sea (v. 2).

God's also described as dressed in white. And his hair is as white as pure wool. His purity is likely meant to contrast the wickedness of the beasts.

But God's not a frail grandfather figure. Verse 9 says, "his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him." Fire here surely represents God's judgment on the nations. And that's seen at the end of verse 10 too, where we read, "the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened." The wickedness of this world will be judged by our righteous God.

This comes out in verses 11-12. As the horn is speaking blasphemy against God, "the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire." This is almost anticlimactic. There's not a long battle scene. It's over in a minute. The terrifying beasts are no match for the eternal God.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Interpretation*

This should've been encouraging to Daniel and to all the people of God. It shows that while the people of God will be opposed throughout history, there will come a day when their warfare is ended. This comes out in the interpretation section.

Look at verses 21-22: "As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, *until* the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High."

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<sup>4</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel: His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, The Bible Speaks Today

<sup>5</sup> Duncan

We see something similar in verses 25-26: “He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. *But* the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.”

### *The Vision of the Son of Man*

But not only will the kingdoms of this world be judged by the Ancient of Days. Not only will God bring them down. God will also establish an everlasting kingdom.

And this is introduced in the vision of the Son of Man in verses 13-14: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.”

Again, this is in contrast to the kings of this earth. The first *like* a lion, the second like a bear, the third, like a leopard. All beastly. But here we see one *like* a son of man. But although a human, he’s also seen in the clouds which, like fire, speaks of divinity.

“And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom” (v. 14a). But this is not just any kingdom. This isn’t a kingdom limited in time and space, like the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, or Roman kingdoms. And it’s not a kingdom with term limits.

We’re told that “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (v. 14b). This is the lesson we’ve been learning throughout the book of Daniel. Kingdoms rise and fall, but God is establishing an everlasting kingdom.

### *Interpretation*

How would this vision be encouraging to Daniel and the people of God? Again, the implications are found in the interpretation section.

Not only will the kingdoms of this world be defeated. Not only is God establishing an everlasting kingdom. But as verse 18 says, “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.” And as verse 27 says, “And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”

Those who belong to God are not part of the failing and falling kingdoms of this world. They may be opposed by them now. But they belong to the kingdom of God which will never be destroyed. And they serve not a beast. They serve the Son of Man. The one God has given as head over his eternal kingdom.

And who is the Son of Man? Daniel 7 doesn’t tell us. But the New Testament tells us. It’s King Jesus.

In Matthew 26, when Jesus was on trial, the high priest asked him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

Jesus clearly identifies himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. Following his death and resurrection, he ascended to the Father, to the Ancient of Days, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And in Matthew 28, before he ascended to the Father, he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Again, a reference to the dominion given to the Son of Man in Daniel 7. God’s eternal kingdom has an eternal king. And his name is Jesus.

At his first coming he established his kingdom. But he didn’t subdue the nations and those who oppose his kingdom at his first coming. That will happen when he comes again on the clouds of heaven. No, at his first coming, he died for the sins of his people. And all who trust in his sacrifice for sins will be saved from their sins and they will become citizens of his kingdom. A kingdom from every nation of the earth.

Do you want to be a part of the kingdom of man that will be destroyed by God? Or do you want to be a part of the kingdom of God that will never be destroyed? If you want to be a citizen of the kingdom of God, you need to surrender to King Jesus. To trust in his sacrifice for your sins. And to submit to his rule.

And for those of you who belong to the kingdom of God, how should you respond to this passage? I know that things are scary right now in our world, but God is on his throne. We need eyes to see into the throne room of God. We need to remember the lessons of Daniel 7, which are summarized in Psalm 2. Sure, the nation’s rage, but they plot in vain against the Lord and his Anointed. The Lord sits in heaven and laughs. He has set his king on Zion, his holy hill. And the Son of God will break them with a rod of iron.

We belong to the unshakable kingdom of the Ancient of Days. We belong to the Son of Man. And his kingdom is forever. We don’t put our hope in this kingdom. We seek first the kingdom of God.