

Daniel 7:1–28

“Beastly Kingdoms and the Son of Man”

Stepping Back in Time: The First Year of Belshazzar

Beginning with Daniel 7, the book shifts from historical narrative to prophetic visions. The events of chapters 1–6 have carried us through the reigns of Babylonian and Medo-Persian kings, but now Daniel takes us back in time to visions he had earlier.

“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.” (Daniel 7:1 NKJV)

This vision comes early in Belshazzar’s reign, years before the fall of Babylon described in Daniel 5.

Four Winds, a Turbulent Sea, and Four Beasts

“Daniel spoke, saying, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.’” (Daniel 7:2–3 NKJV)

The sea in Scripture often symbolizes the restless nations of the world—humanity in turmoil. Out of this churning sea Daniel sees four beasts, each representing a kingdom.

1. The First Beast – Lion with Eagle’s Wings

“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.” (Daniel 7:4 NKJV)

The lion with eagle’s wings pictures power, speed, and majesty. Many interpreters see this as representing the Babylonian Empire, especially under Nebuchadnezzar. The plucking of the wings and the giving of a “man’s heart” recalls Nebuchadnezzar’s humbling and restoration (Daniel 4).

2. The Second Beast – Bear with Three Ribs

“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!’” (Daniel 7:5 NKJV)

The bear is massive and devouring. Many see this as the Medo-Persian Empire, lopsided in power (one side raised higher than the other), conquering widely and ruthlessly, pictured by the three ribs.

3. The Third Beast – Leopard with Four Wings and Four Heads

“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.” (Daniel 7:6 NKJV)

The leopard speaks of speed and agility; the extra wings emphasize rapid conquest. Many connect this with the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great, who moved with astonishing speed. After Alexander's early death, his empire was divided into several parts, often associated with the four heads.

4. The Fourth Beast – Terrifying and Different

“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.”

(Daniel 7:7 NKJV)

This fourth beast is so fierce that Daniel cannot compare it to any animal. It crushes and devours. Historically, many see this as pointing to the Roman Empire—relentless, iron-like in its strength. Yet the vision is not just about one ancient empire; it reveals the beastly nature of human power whenever it tries to rule without God.

Ten Horns and a Little Horn

“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.”

(Daniel 7:8 NKJV)

Horns represent power and rulers. Ten horns suggest a fullness of political power arising out of this fourth beastly system. Then a “little horn” appears, displacing three, and is marked by intelligence (“eyes like a man”) and arrogant speech.

This “little horn” points to a future anti-God ruler or system—an embodiment of rebellion against God that exalts itself and speaks proud, defiant words. Throughout history we have seen many such powers, but Daniel looks ahead to a final, climactic expression of this kind of arrogance.

The Courtroom of Heaven: The Ancient of Days

While the beasts rage on earth, the scene shifts to heaven.

“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;
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.” (Daniel 7:9–10 NKJV)

“Ancient of Days” is a title for the eternal God. His whiteness speaks of purity; the fire speaks of holiness and judgment. Heaven is not in chaos. While nations rise and fall, God is seated in perfect authority. The court convenes. The books are opened. Nothing is hidden. Judgment is coming.

“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.”
(Daniel 7:11 NKJV)

The arrogant power that seemed unstoppable on earth is destroyed in a moment when God decides its time is over. Human empires are temporary. God’s verdict is final.

The Son of Man and the Everlasting Kingdom

Now the vision reaches its glorious center.

“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.
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.” (Daniel 7:13–14 NKJV)

“Son of Man” is the title Jesus most often used for Himself in the Gospels. When He stood before the high priest, He linked Daniel 7 to His own identity:

“Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:64 NKJV)

The kingdom described in Daniel 7 is the kingdom given to Jesus Christ. He is fully human and fully divine—the Son of Man and the eternal Son of God. Because He shed His blood on the cross for our sins and rose again, God has exalted Him and given Him all authority in heaven and on earth. His dominion will never end (see also Isaiah 9:6–7 and Luke 1:30–33 NKJV).

The Interpretation: Beasts, Kingdoms, and the Saints

Daniel is deeply disturbed by what he sees.

“I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. 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:

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

(Daniel 7:15–18 NKJV)

The message is clear:

- Human kingdoms rise and fall.
- They are beastlike—driven by pride, conquest, and self-glory.
- But in the end, the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and share in the reign of the Son of Man.

Daniel then asks specifically about the fourth beast and the little horn:

“I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast... and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up... whose appearance was greater than his fellows. I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, 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.” (Daniel 7:19–22 NKJV)

For a season, this arrogant power will persecute God’s people and appear to win. But only for a time. God sets a limit. Judgment is rendered in favor of the saints. The time comes when they receive the kingdom.

The angel explains further:

“The fourth beast shall be
A fourth kingdom on earth...
The ten horns are ten kings
Who shall arise from this kingdom.
And another shall rise after them;
He shall be different from the first ones,
And shall subdue three kings.
He shall speak pompous words against the Most High,
Shall persecute the saints of the Most High,
And shall intend to change times and law.

Then the saints shall be given into his hand
For a time and times and half a time.” (Daniel 7:23–25 NKJV)

There will be seasons when evil seems to dominate and God’s people suffer. But the story does not end there.

“But the court shall be seated,
And they shall take away his dominion,
To consume and destroy it forever.
Then the kingdom and dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.” (Daniel 7:26–27 NKJV)

Daniel closes the chapter honestly:

“This is the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart.” (Daniel 7:28 NKJV)

The vision overwhelms him—but it also anchors him. God rules. The Son of Man will reign. The saints will share His kingdom forever.

Practical Application for Believers

Daniel 7 is not given so we can build detailed timelines and argue over charts. It is given to shape how we live now in a world of beastlike powers.

1. Do Not Be Intimidated by Beastly Kingdoms

Every age has its empires—political, cultural, economic—that act like beasts: devouring, trampling, and exalting themselves. Daniel 7 reminds us that:

- Their power is **temporary**.
- Their authority is **limited**.
- Their end is **certain**.

Application:

Do not let fear of governments, systems, or cultural pressures control you. Respect lawful authority, but remember that no earthly power has the final word. The Ancient of Days does.

2. Recognize the Beast Within

These beasts are not just “out there.” Humanity without God tends to act in beastlike ways: driven by pride, greed, and the desire to dominate. Even believers can slip into patterns of self-protection and self-glory.

Application:

Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Are there areas where you are living more like a beast than a saint—pursuing power, control, or self-promotion instead of Christlike humility and love?

3. Cling to the Son of Man, Not to the Beasts

The central figure in Daniel 7 is not the beasts—it is the Son of Man who receives the kingdom. His dominion will never end.

Application:

Anchor your hope, identity, and future in Jesus Christ. Do not put ultimate trust in human leaders, parties, or movements. They come and go. His kingdom is everlasting.

4. Expect Pressure, But Remember the Verdict

The little horn “makes war against the saints” and “prevails” for a time (Daniel 7:21 NKJV). God’s people are not promised an easy path. We are promised His presence, His Spirit, and a final victory.

Application:

Do not be surprised by hostility or suffering for Christ. When you are mocked, marginalized, or mistreated for your faith, remember that the court of heaven has already decided the outcome. Judgment will be in favor of the saints. Live with confidence, not despair.

5. Live Now as Citizens of a Coming Kingdom

The saints will receive the kingdom and reign with Christ (see also Revelation 5:9–10 NKJV). That future calling should shape present character.

Application:

If you are going to reign with Christ, start learning His ways now—justice, mercy, truth, humility, and love. Let His Word shape your decisions, your relationships, and your priorities.

A Challenge to Believers

Daniel was deeply affected by what he saw. We should be too.

- Are you more captivated by earthly kingdoms than by the kingdom of God?
- Do your daily choices reflect trust in the Son of Man or fear of the beasts?
- Are you willing to stand with Christ and His people even when it costs you—reputation, opportunity, comfort?

Ask yourself honestly:

“If I truly believe that Jesus’ kingdom is everlasting and that I will stand before the Ancient of Days, what would I do differently this week?”

Let Daniel’s vision pull you out of small, self-centered living and into a larger, eternal perspective.

An Invitation to Non-Believers: The Son of Man and You

Daniel 7 is not just about ancient empires and future conflicts. It is about **a King**.

The Son of Man in Daniel 7 is Jesus Christ—the One who:

- Left the glory of heaven.
- Took on real humanity.
- Lived a sinless life.
- Shed His blood on the cross for our sins.
- Rose from the dead in power.

His death on the cross was not a tragic accident. It was God’s plan to rescue us. On that cross, Jesus bore the judgment we deserve. The wrath of God against sin fell on Him so that mercy could be offered to us.

His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. He is not just a teacher or prophet. He is the One to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.

One day, every person will stand before the Ancient of Days. The books will be opened. Your life will be examined. Your own “kingdom” will not stand. Your only hope on that day is to belong to the Son of Man who shed His blood for you.

The good news is that He invites you now—before that day comes—to turn to Him and receive forgiveness and new life.

Scripture says:

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13 NKJV)

If you sense God drawing your heart, you can respond to Him with a sincere prayer like this:

“Lord Jesus, I confess that I have sinned against You.

I believe that You died on the cross and shed Your blood for my sins.

I believe that You rose from the dead and that You are God, Savior, and Lord.

I turn from my sin and my self-rule, and I surrender my life to You.

*Please forgive me, cleanse me, and make me new.
Help me to follow You and live as a citizen of Your kingdom. Amen.”*

The prayer itself does not save you—Jesus does. But if you truly turn to Him in repentance and faith, He will not cast you out.

Closing Prayer

Father,

We thank You for this powerful vision You gave to Daniel. We see how fragile and beastlike human kingdoms can be, and we confess that our own hearts can drift in that direction. We worship You as the Ancient of Days, holy and sovereign, and we thank You for the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the cross for our sins and rose again in power, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

For those who belong to You, strengthen our faith. Help us to live with courage, integrity, and hope in the midst of a turbulent world. Keep us from fearing the beasts and teach us to fix our eyes on Jesus and His everlasting kingdom.

For those who do not yet know You, draw them by Your Spirit. Let them see both the seriousness of judgment and the greatness of Your love. May many turn to Jesus and find forgiveness, new life, and a place in His kingdom.

*We commit ourselves afresh to You.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*