
God's Kingdom Prevails

Daniel 7:1-28

Introduction .

Remember the scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* as the dark rises, Morder gains ascendancy over the kingdoms of man? The evil power of Sauron, he of the great, evil eye and the Saruman with his beguiling words are evocative of this text. While I do not know how much these texts influenced Tolkein, it would be no surprise.



Patience will be needed as I allow the texts to unfold. Many of your questions will go unanswered until we move further through our studies. Yes, I do know what I believe these things represent as a result of general and specific study. But it is my aim in this book and in this study to show how the unfolding of Biblical revelation helps rightly understand the texts. What these visions fully represent can only be fully understood in the light of their illumination, quotation, explanation and expansion in the New Testament. We will build up our understanding as we get there; and we will.

I also want to caution you about something else. Many of you hold to a schema of future things that is greatly detailed and highly prized. Some of what I will say will sound like your system. Do not assume that to be so. Some hold to a very different scheme. You will be alarmed by some things I say and assured by others. In other words, just as I am neither a dispensationalist nor covenantalist in my approach to the Bible, I do not hold entirely to either of the eschatologies produced by the respective systems.

You ask, “So, what to you believe? What framework do you operate from? How do we interpret what you say when sometimes I am alarmed and sometimes I am assured by what you say?” Well, I am glad you asked.

I am a New Covenant theologian committed to a grammatical-redemptive historical method of interpretation. I believe that the Old Testament is to be read and understood in the light of the New. The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and His exaltation as King over all are New Testament controls on our understanding of the Old Testament. I do not believe in a future blessing for the nation of Israel – I believe the Bible teaches that the promises to Abraham, David and Solomon are fulfilled in Christ. Every person, Jew and Gentile, who is placed into Christ, receives the fulfillment of those promises as ultimately intended. God has established His kingdom in heaven and in the future. The glories of the future kingdom age, primarily spoken of as eternal life, have broken into this age through the incarnation, resurrection and regeneration. The kingdom is expanding through the preaching of the

gospel, the granting of eternal life through the Spirit in the new birth with the gifts of faith and repentance. At the end of days, there will be a great falling away accompanied by a final intrusion of the powers of darkness and Satan into this age through a Satan incarnating messianic figure who will attempt to rule the world. The Lord Himself will return from the heavens, reward His saints, crush His enemies, judge the living and the dead casting them into hell. Just as the world was destroyed by water in Noah's day, the present world will be destroyed by fire with the new heavens and earth emerging when the final regeneration and glorification take place by the Word and Spirit filling all the universe with life eternal.

Now, I well know that some of what I have just said makes sense to you and some if it sounds like something you have heard before but you don't know what it means. That is the whole purpose of this study of which our exposition of Daniel is a part. But I do not intend this study to merely fill in your theological and eschatological notebooks and schemas. I want to serve the purpose that Peter puts forward in 2 Peter 3 as represented in the New Living Translation.

This is my second letter to you, dear friends, and in both of them I have tried to stimulate your wholesome thinking and refresh your memory. ²I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles.

³Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. ⁴They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created."

⁵They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. ⁶Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. ⁷And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed.

⁸But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. ⁹The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

¹¹Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, ¹²looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. ¹³But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.

¹⁴And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

For this grace and to this purpose, let us ask for God's help.

Receiving the Dream

(v1-14)

With an almost abrupt turn, we are brought to what Daniel sees...

A Significant Time

(v.1)

"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.

Immediately upon the ascendancy of Belshazzar, Daniel has this vision. Remember that Belshazzar has become the co-regent with his father through a series of brief and failed kingships. Through Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, God had revealed the times of the Gentiles and the four great world powers who would succeed one another. From the sheer pride and power of Babylon, each would be lesser in glory, a descent in their ascendancy.

Now, through a series of dreams and visions, God is going to reveal more about those four world powers. As the second of the great world powers was preparing and provisioning for the overthrow of the first, Daniel dreams frightening visions.

The Great Beasts

(v.2-8)

Daniel declared, "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 out of the sea, different from one another. 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. 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.' 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. 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. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little 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."

Now, a new and sobering vision of unfolding history awakens and alarms Daniel in the night. Instead of four deteriorating parts of a magnificent colossus, he sees a parade of filthy beasts. Arising out of the slimy and turbulent sea, four foul and ferocious beasts prowl. No house pets these. Stalking across the Serengeti plains of history, these vicious predators stalk and slaughter and strew the blood and bones of lesser nations in dank dens. Out of the chaos of their origin, driven by a craving hunger for power, they spread cruelty and carnage across time and space.

This imagery would have been familiar to any Babylonian. Their creation myths were filled with a roiling, turbulent sea, mighty creatures trolling its depths with chaos barely being overcome by the order imposed by mighty human-gods who emerge from its depths. Yet, the end is so unlike the final descent into doom and destruction where all returns to the primordial mists and mud.

I could say it no better than this: "As the whole fearful drama was played out before his eyes, his horror mounted, for each succeeding beast became more cruel and monster-like than the one before..."¹⁰ The first beast appears initially like a

lion and with eagle's wings. This beast has its wings plucked and is transformed into a man, standing on his two feet with a sound mind. The second beast is deformed and bear-like, its maws filled with flesh decorated bones, prepared for much slaughter. The third beast is a grotesquely mutated, but powerfully sleek, four-headed, four winged leopard whose hunting grounds were great and wide.

A black cloud of fear, dread and terror trailed in the wake of the fourth beast. Unlike no beast on earth, its jaws were iron, its feet crushing, its head bristling with ten horns. Suddenly, as Daniel watched, a smaller horn grew up among the others then ripped three of the horns out like bloody tree stumps with its roots dripping gore. Then fierce eyes glared out from the little horn while a snarling mouth twisted in great, boasting words.

The Glorious Throne

(v.9-10)

"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. 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."

What an amazing scene now unfolds. A courtroom is set with stately chairs surrounding the magnificent portable throne on fiery burning wheels familiar to us from Ezekiel. Over against the ghastly and grotesque beasts, the stately Ancient of Days takes His seat. Ageless in purity of hair and clothes, a pillar of fire jets out before him. Untold numbers are poised to serve and stand to praise. In one motion, the beings on the thrones sit as the court is convened. Beautiful and dread are the books which are brought and opened whose pages crawl with dark deeds and terrible dooms.

The Victorious Execution

(v.11-12)

"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. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time."

In the background, the fierce eyes and foul mouth of the little horn pour out the proud and perverse words. The court renders its decision. Powerful guardians are summoned who execute the final beast, burning its body with fire. The other beasts lose their dominion but retain their lives for a short time.

The Royal Presentation

(v.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. 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."

Words can hardly convey the stately majestic aspect and arrival of this personage. He comes in a cloud and is presented to the great Ancient of Days as a favored son and a faithful soldier. The mantle of rule is laid upon his broad shoulders and the crown of the kingdom pressed upon his stately brow. In his train and

under his hand, blessed peoples of all the nations serve, forever. Of His kingdom there will be no end to its spreading horizon or its everlasting dominion.

Summarizing the Message

(v.15-18)

In his waking dream, here is what Daniel seeks...

The Request

(v.15-16)

"As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. 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."

Daniel seeks help to allay the alarms and anxiousness of his spirit. In his vision, he approaches one of those who stand around the glorious Presence upon the throne. He inquires as to the truth, the meaning, the interpretation of these things.

The Response

(v.17-18)

"These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever."

In two sentences, the interpreter summarizes the meaning and focuses the message. Like these four dreadful beasts, four great kingdoms will arise out of the earth and have dominion. But, in the end, the Most High's sanctified ones, His saints, will receive the kingdom and it will be their eternal possession.

The careful reader will note three things as Daniel begins to set the stage for our understanding of unfolding of redemptive history in the times of the Gentiles.

In the vision the kingdom is given to the one who approaches the Ancient of Days. In the interpretation, the kingdom is received by the people of God. In the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, this blending of the Christ and His people is common. It may have created confusion for them; but it is so clear to us now in the New Covenant. The true union between Christ and His people mean that the kingdom is given to Him and it is received by us.

The kingdom that is received is forever. It is an eternal dominion. It is not a kingdom for a short period of time. Consistent with all the promises that are made to Abraham, David, Solomon and now predicted here, the kingdom of God is over all his people forever.

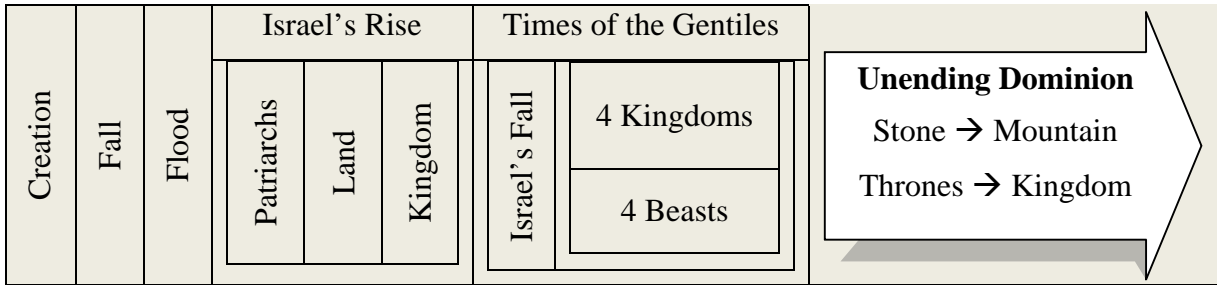
The kingdom is one that is received by God's people from every tongue, tribe and nation. The kingdom referred to here is not circumscribed by one nation, that is the Jews, nor a local geographical place, that is, Israel.

Therefore, the kingdom being referred to here is not and cannot be limited to what is commonly called the Millennial Kingdom. The parallels between the colossus of Daniel 2 and the beasts of Daniel 7 cannot be missed. The image shows four kingdoms in decreasing quality who are eventually destroyed. The beasts show four kingdoms in increasing foulness and ferocity. The first three are overthrown but remain alive as nations. The fourth beast is simply utterly destroyed.

The great stone that shatters the image of Daniel 2 becomes a mountain filling the earth. Daniel 2 and 7 are fundamental to any schema of eschatology. Daniel lays out the times of the Gentiles encompassing four great kingdoms and the final

and eternal establishment of the God's kingdom, with His Son its appointed regent and his saints receiving and serving in it.

At the point in redemptive history when this text is given, this is the basic schema. More details are filled in throughout the rest of Daniel, other prophetic literature and in the New Testament. However, all those texts are built on this basic and essential foundation.



So, what do these four beasts refer to? Whose kingdoms are they? Most commentators are agreed on the first three, including such as Calvin. The fourth is the most difficult at this point in our text. Let me remind you that patience will be needed – I have no intention of running forward to other texts to answer your questions.

What was Seen		What is Signified
Image of Daniel 2	Beasts of Daniel 7	
Head	Winged Lion→Man	Babylon
Chest	Bone-crunching Bear	Medes and Persians
Thighs	Four headed, winged Leopard	Greece
Legs and Feet	Iron jawed, horned Beast	Rome
Stone →Mountain	Thrones	God's Eternal Kingdom

That the head of gold and first beast refer to Babylon and specifically to Nebuchadnezzar is obvious in both texts. Nebuchadnezzar's conversion is even alluded to in his transformation. The bear refers to the Medes and Persians who were known for their overwhelming strength, austere life styles and rapacious cruelty. The three ribs probably refer to Babylon, Egypt and Assyria who were overthrown by them. The four winged and headed leopard refers to Greece and its rapid world conquest and subsequent division among four generals upon the death of Alexander the Great.

One of the reasons the fourth beast is different may be rooted in the fact that Rome was initially a geo-political kingdom but is now a cultural-political kingdom. It has given rise to trans-national, multi-millennial civilization. Calvin goes to great length including two whole lectures on how ancient Rome and the Rome of Jesus' day fulfilled are the fourth beast. I will leave you to that reading to see whether he and others following the trail of preterism are persuasive.

Understanding the Meaning (v.19-27)

With a basic summary in hand, now we have what Daniel learns...

The Domain of the Fourth Beast (v.19-26)

Daniel is particularly concerned to understand the fourth beast. His concern is not only about its nature but also about its destruction.

His Unfolding Description (v.19-22)

"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, 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. 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, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

The enigmatic answer given to Daniel is just enough to intrigue us all but not clear enough for us to be emphatic as to the whole of its meaning. It is left to Jesus' eschatological talks in Matthew and Luke, Paul in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians and John in the Revelation to give us more detail.

Daniel is first *shown* more detail. The fourth beast terrifies and triumphs with its iron jaws and bronze feet. It devours and destroys all that stand in its way. That little horn that arises among the ten seems to increase in stature even as it swells with swaggering words. Through treachery, blasphemy and usurpation it gains the ascendancy. The horn of the terrifying beast wages war on the saints, persecuting and prevailing over them for three and half times, seasons or more probably, years. In a final detail, the judgment thrones are revealed to be on behalf of the God's people, the saints of the Most High. Then, they take possession of the kingdom.

His Universal Ascension (v.23-25)

"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. 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. 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.

The interpreter now tells Daniel more detail. The fourth beast is the fourth empire which rules over the whole earth. This empire will be radically different from the rest. It is likely that this is referring to the fact that it will eventually be more than a geographical and political system. It will give rise to a civilization, a whole economic, political and cultural empire possibly lasting over millennia. It will eventually hold sway over the whole earth.

The kingdom is made up of ten rulers who emerge within the scope of this kingdom or empire. These appear to be kings who will succeed one another over time. Another mighty king will arise who will overthrow three of the kings.

This king is given several distinguishing characteristics which will be illuminated later in Daniel and in other apocalyptic literature.

He will be different from the other three. At this point in Daniel and in our study, what is meant by that is not clear. As we move through the book and into future studies we shall be on the look out for explanations of how he is different.

He will openly blaspheme and oppose the God of heaven. His attempt at world-wide rule will emulate and seek to replace God's kingdom. His swelling rhetoric will eventually turn against the God of the Bible.

He will persecute believers, the saints of God. His war against God will manifest itself as a war on believers. He will persecute and pursue the saints of the Most High thinking to bring them to an utter end.

He will seek self-deification in the altering of time and natural law. This enigmatic statement, drawn from Babylonian myths, refers to his seeking through absolute power, not only over people, but also over nature, to be the god of the world.

He will be in his ascendancy when he will be given power for 3 ½ "times". This is the first time we have what will be repeated several times: the phrase time, times and one-half time. Commentators generally agree that this is referring to three and half years. Further developments in Daniel and elsewhere will confirm this.

His Ultimate Destruction

(v.26)

But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end."

The interpreter reiterates for the comfort of Daniel and God's people that this mighty personage is still accountable to the God of heaven, to His decrees, decisions, Law and judgments. His self-deification is a self-delusion. In the end, his kingdom is taken away and he is eternally and ultimately destroyed. He and all his followers will be cast into the lake of fire there to suffer eternal punishment for rebelling against the Most High, the King of glory.

The Dominion of the Most High

(v.27)

"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."

Finally, in a breathtaking anticipation of the New Covenant, Daniel is told that the kingdom received by the Son is given to the saints, the people of God.¹¹ The grand vision here that unfolds in the New Covenant and through eternity is of a kingdom of God's people, ruling and serving with their king.

Reflect and Respond

How dreadful the rise and fall of the pagan nations. Do not think the United States are different or exempt. We are a part of the turbulent sea of peoples and the filthy and fierce beasts. Since there will be a day when the Lord will come and all kingdoms will fall, this is our destiny as well, if not before then.

We must never forget the terrible doom that awaits not only the enemy of our souls, not only the persecutors of our lives, but every unbeliever who dies without faith. May this keep our hope secure and our evangelism strong.

How we tend to have such small thoughts of what it means to be a Christian. Here is a grand and glorious vision which will actually unfold. In great pomp and circumstance, Christ will be publicly enthroned in the gathered presence of His people.

I remind you again of Peter's words, now from our beloved ESV:

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

In the light of movement of history along the path of God's sovereign plan, be a people who are diligent in your pursuit of God, purity and peace.

Notes

¹⁰ Wallace, Ronald S., *The Message of Daniel*, p.121.

¹¹ Some commentators, serving their frameworks, go to great pains to try to show that the saints in the visions of Daniel are believing Jews. They come to the text believing that any kingdom here must be a Jewish kingdom and since it is future, it must be a millennial kingdom. It is hard to understand why Daniel would use the word "saints" here if he intends believing Jews. Why would he do so having just included Nebuchadnezzar's conversion letter? Finally, the use of saints in the New Testament in relation to God's kingdom includes but is not limited to believing Jews. In other words, the Holy Spirit in His giving of this vision to the prophet Daniel and its recording in the book of Daniel uses the term intentionally. It is intended to have a redemptive, historical, towards the New Covenant trajectory.