

## The Four Beasts and the Kingdom of Forever

Scripture Text: Daniel 7:1-14

### Introduction

The world seems to be racked with uncontrollable events. People with their own agendas inflict their selfish and evil will on others. For instance, Hitler tried to conquer the world around him and eliminate an entire race of people during World War II. More recently, on September 11, 2001, Muslim terrorists took control of four airplanes and flew them into several buildings killing thousands of people. And, just this week, we learned about the continued threat of North Korea whose leader, Kim Jong-un, is now threatening to attack the island of Guam with a nuclear weapon. There has been much discussion about what to do. There has been much disagreement about how our government, namely the President of the United States, has and should respond to this situation. No doubt, there is much fear in the world, particularly of those who live in the region near North Korea. The world has been and continues to be ruled by ruthless men who seek to exert power and to oppress and persecute others. How should we respond to things like this? Does the Bible speak to the chaos in which we live? Indeed it does!

The prophet Daniel also lived during a turbulent time and faced many challenges from ungodly and oppressive people. Throughout the book of Daniel, we have learned about the power of evil men and their will to oppress God's people. We have also learned about the persecution of God's people under the power of evil men. How did Daniel respond to these things? Daniel responded with an unwavering trust in God. We have been reminded of God's faithful protection of His people in difficult times, such as Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace, and Daniel's frightening experience in the lions' den. The thing we are constantly reminded throughout the book of Daniel is this: *God is still sovereign!* No matter what schemes of Satan or what his little minions try to do to thwart God's plan, God is still in control. When we face the roaring lion of Satan, who seeks to do us harm, the best response is to still trust God.

### A Man of Strange Vision

The first six chapters of the book of Daniel are about some of the important events in Daniel's life while he was in exile in Babylon. The last half of the book, chapters seven through twelve, describes Daniel's visions of what is going to happen in the future. Daniel was a man of vision. Actually, he was a prophet who received visions from God. We read in the very first chapter of the book that Daniel and his three friends were all gifted with knowledge and wisdom, but Daniel was blessed even more to receive divine revelation and was able to understand visions and dreams. Look at the following verse.

***Daniel 1:17*** *As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.*

God used Daniel to interpret divine revelations, such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the giant statue in chapter two, his other dream of the giant tree in chapter four, and when

Belshazzar saw the strange handwriting on the wall in chapter five. What was the purpose of these visions? What was God trying to show Daniel and why? One thing Daniel's visions were meant to do was to reassure God's people that He was still in control and He would see His plan for the world and His people happen. If you recall, Daniel lived, had these visions, and wrote this book during a time when God's people were exiles in Babylon. They had been defeated. They had been removed from their homes and taken by force to a godless country. If you want to know what fear and discouragement look like, read about God's people during the time of Daniel. But, the message God had for them, a message which He has for us today, is in spite of exile and persecution, nothing will thwart God's plan. Nothing will deter His will.

### **Beasts Will Reign For a Little While**

In an episode of Star Trek Voyager, the crew was sent back in time to Los Angeles California during the 1990s. During their adventure, two of the crew were captured by some gun-toting, country men who hated the United States government. That should not sound too foreign to us? These men referred to the U.S. government as "The Beast". That term "beast" probably brings to mind images of some giant and ferocious animal that seeks to devour any others in its path. Surely, dictators and governments of the world have been like that. Men in power seek to secure their power and oppress any who try to oppose them. Sometimes governments, even our own government, can be a "beast"! There are seemingly uncontrollable forces in the world that seek to subdue and inflict pain on others. Daniel saw a vision that described some uncontrollable things. And, what Daniel saw alarmed him and made him anxious (Daniel 7:15, 28). This might be described as waking up from a bad dream. Look at the following verses.

***Daniel 7:2–3*** <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."

In his vision, Daniel saw the "four winds of heaven", perhaps suggesting winds from all parts of the earth. These winds were stirring up the great sea, maybe like a hurricane, which can stir the ocean greatly. This image may be a symbol for chaos, maybe even rebellion against God. It could stand for the restlessness and turmoil of sinful men. The picture Daniel had was of a world that is not at peace. And then, Daniel saw four terrifying beasts come out of the turbulent sea. These four beasts represent four mighty kingdoms. Most scholars believe these beasts symbolize the same kingdoms as the colossal statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two. If so, these four beasts probably represent the following kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

The first beast, a lion with eagles' wings, represents the kingdom of Babylon. This is the same kingdom that God used to punish His people in Judah by exiling them. The wings of this flying lion were "plucked off" which may represent when God humbled King Nebuchadnezzar, who roamed the earth like a wild animal for a time. The second beast, a bear, represents Medo-Persia. This is the kingdom that conquered Babylon the night of Belshazzar's handwriting-on-the-wall and his subsequent death. The three ribs could

represent the three nations that Medo-Persia conquered, Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt. The third beast was part leopard, part bird, with four wings and four heads. It combined fierceness and speed with the ability to see in all four directions at once. This beast probably represents Greece, namely Alexander the Great, who within ten years had conquered the entire Persian Empire. After his death, Alexander's empire was divided among four of his generals, which may be what the four heads on this beast mean.

Lastly, the fourth and final beast was also a unique creature with mixed animal characteristics. It was terrifying and dreadful, very strong, with great iron teeth that devoured and crushed, and trampled down whatever it did not eat. Its head had ten horns, similar to the ten toes on the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2:42). The fourth beast probably represents the Roman Empire, which assimilated the various parts of the Greek kingdom, and which far surpassed the earlier kingdoms in power, longevity, and influence. The world had never before seen anything like it. This fourth beast would make war against the saints and prevail over them (vss. 21, 25). So, what is the main point of Daniel's vision of many strange beasts? What was God trying to say? One thing we can say from Daniel's perspective is that tough times would come for God's people. Earthly kingdoms would come and go and they would inflict pain and suffering on God's people for a while. But thankfully, that was not the end of the story.

### God's Judgement Is Coming

People think they are in control. Kings, presidents, political leaders, and even church leaders and members, think they are in control. They try to control the world around them. But, are any of us, even kings and dictators, truly in control? What we think we have is actually given by God. For instance, dominion was given to the third kingdom in Daniel's vision, suggesting a higher power was controlling these actions.

***Daniel 7:6*** 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.**

This indicates that the real power belongs to someone else. And not only does the real power belong to someone else, all of these beasts, the earthly powers, will answer to the Supreme King and Judge of the universe. At the center of Daniel's vision was the heavenly courtroom set up for judgment. Look at the following verses.

***Daniel 7:9-10*** <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.

Daniel mentioned someone called the "Ancient of Days", literally "the elderly one". The title "Ancient of Days" is a title of God that refers to His eternal nature. Isaiah prophesied about God in this way, calling Him the "everlasting God" (Isaiah 40:28). Moses wrote a

prayer in Psalm 90 praising God's eternal nature. In this vision, God's clothing was white as snow and His hair white as pure wool. His chariot-throne was flaming with fire and its wheels were ablaze with a stream of fire that flowed out in front of him. This scene describes God having the wisdom to sort out right from wrong, the purity to persistently choose the right, and the power to enforce His judgments. Thousands and thousands of people served God, and even more were just standing before Him. These people represent all the kingdoms of the earth standing before God. Even though beastly kingdoms defy God, their dominion and power will not last. No matter how beastly the world's powers become, including those today that inflict terror on the rest of the world, God's plan will prevail. The main point of Daniel's vision is that no power on earth can subdue God or His righteous will. Beyond the earthly kingdoms lies God's heavenly court where God will tame and destroy the beasts in the final judgement.

### **Jesus Is Coming With An Everlasting Kingdom**

Not only are the earthly kingdoms on borrowed time, literally, and not only is God always in control, someone other than the Ancient of Days will reign as King. God will give power and authority to someone else. Look at the following verses.

***Daniel 7:13–14*** <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.*

Daniel saw a person like “a son of man”. Elsewhere in scripture, this title refers to someone who is merely human, such as when God called Ezekiel “son of man”. However, in this vision of Daniel, the son of man is greater than any mere mortal. He has both human and divine traits. This son of man will come from heaven on the clouds. This son of man will be given dominion, a kingdom, and glory. All peoples, nations, and languages will serve this son of man. His kingdom will also not pass away; it will remain forever. Who is this son of man? Toward the end of His ministry, Jesus foretold about the end times when this “Son of Man” would return. Look at the following verses.

***Matthew 24:29–31*** <sup>29</sup> *Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

The son of man Daniel saw in his vision is none other than Jesus. In fact, Jesus spoke of Himself as the “son of man” more than any other title. The point this vision is making here is that Jesus' kingdom is above all other kingdoms. Jesus is King above all other

kings. This is similar to the stone that demolished the giant statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two (Daniel 2:44-45). Earthly kingdoms will rule for a while, but the King of kings will return to rule forever. Evil reigns for a while. Trouble comes for a season. The world is chaotic. But the good news of the Gospel is that God is still in control and Jesus is King. When He returns, evil will be finally vanquished. Amen!

## **Conclusion**

In closing, what does Daniel's vision have to say to us who live in a chaotic world? What does this say to us who may worry about the world's affairs? Daniel's vision reveals the truth of earthly powers that rule for a time. But, there is coming a day when God will establish His Son's kingdom and Jesus, the Son of Man, will reign supreme forever. God is sovereign. God is in control. How might this give you comfort today? Consider what gives you comfort. What do you really look to give you peace and security? Is it your job? Is it your finances? Is it your government? Is it a particular party that is in power? If these do, then you do not have true peace. All earthly things will pass. All earthly things will change. Therefore, our faith and trust must be in Jesus Christ and in His kingdom. When the storms of life are turbulent, our anchor needs to be Jesus. How great a God we serve! How great a Savior we have! This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!