

FOUR BEASTS

DANIEL 7

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Belshazzar was made a co-regent with his father, Nabonidus, in 553 B.C. In the first year of his reign, God gave Daniel a vision that was similar to the one that He had given Nebuchadnezzar more than fifty years earlier. Daniel was now about 67 years old and Nebuchadnezzar had been dead about 9 years. The message was different, but the meaning was very similar. Daniel's vision of the four world empires in chapter seven differs from Nebuchadnezzar's vision in chapter two in that Daniel is shown these empires from God's viewpoint, while Nebuchadnezzar saw them from man's viewpoint. To Nebuchadnezzar these empires were presented as a powerful majestic man. To Daniel they were presented as vicious wild beasts. God was depicting to Daniel, and to all those who would read his prophecy, the extent to which man's depravity would fall.

Both visions also revealed the final victory of God over these Gentile powers. God would give His Son a kingdom that would be eternal and world-wide. This chapter gives more details than Daniel 2 about the activities of the Antichrist during the Tribulation and his final defeat. The repetition of the truths given in Daniel 2 and 7 indicate the importance of this message from God.

Aim of the Lesson

Show the believer that he or she must submit to God so they can do His work.

"Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the son of man shall give unto you: for him has God sealed" (Jn 6:27).

Outline of the Lesson (Use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you.)

I. Introduction (7:1-3)

God symbolized through beasts the origin of the four world kingdoms in the vision He gave to Daniel. The four kingdoms were earthy, originating out of the turbulent sea of human brutality and hostility. All of the beasts were different from each other to some extent, but they were all alike in that they were of human origin. Only Christ's Kingdom is of divine origin. Nevertheless, God's sovereignty was evident in the vision: Far above all of man's devices were the "four winds of the heaven" that symbolized God's influence in the affairs of men (7:2).

We can be reassured of the fact that God is in complete control of man's destiny. God allows men to devise their schemes, but He skillfully uses them to ultimately work out His plan.

II. Four Beasts (7:4-8, 15-25)

The four beasts symbolized four powerful governments that ruled over His people. These four governments differed, not in their basic origin, but in their philosophies of government and methods of control. The primary attributes of each government are pictured in the characteristics of each beast. Each becomes progressively worse, and also incorporates some of the qualities of the preceding kingdom into its own (cf. 7:12).

A. The Lion with Eagle's Wings (7:4) - Personal Pride

The first beast in Daniel's vision was the lion, the king of all beasts, which had two wings of an eagle, the mighty king of birds. The lion with eagles' wings symbolized the proud kings of Babylon. It was a kingdom built on the accomplishments of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled as an absolute monarch. Nebuchadnezzar was proud of his achievements, but it brought him under the judgment of God until he learned that God is the absolute Ruler and nothing is done without His permission (Dan 3, 4). Belshazzar did not learn this lesson from his grandfather's encounter with God's judgment for pride, so his pride cost him his life when his kingdom was given to the Persians (Dan 5). Babylon was man's attempt to rule with pride and splendor, and be completely independent of God who created all things for His glory.

B. The Bear with Three Ribs in Its Mouth (7:5) - Powerful Military

The second beast was a bear with the three ribs in its mouth, which pictured Medo-Persia's strength to conquer its foes. Its all-consuming passion was the "devouring of much flesh" through its victorious armies. It was founded upon a strong military machine. Pride was certainly evident in the leadership of Cyrus (cf. Herodotus Book I, pp. 189; Cyrus' Cylinder), but his kingdom was built by military might. The bear is not known for speed as it lumbers along its way, so it had no wings. This also pictured the slow conquest of Medo-Persia's neighbors (Lydia in 546 BC; Babylon in 539 BC; and Egypt in 525 BC). One side of the bear was higher than the other, which illustrated the relationship of Media to Persia: Persia conquered Media, so Persia was higher (cf. Dan 8:3). Medo-Persia was man's attempt to rule the world by military strength, apart from the strength of almighty God.

C. The Leopard with Four Wings and Four Heads (7:6) - Political Ambition

The third beast was a leopard with four wings on its back. The leopard is a swift cat, but when coupled with four wings, it presents a picture of very rapid movement. This was a perfect prophetic portrayal of Alexander the Great's rapid conquest of the Medo-Persian Empire (331 BC–323 BC). The leopard also portrayed the all-consuming thirst of Greece for power. It arose out of political ambition. Alexander the Great, the leader of the Greco-Macedonians, was said to have sat down and wept when there were no more empires to conquer. The intoxicating motive behind Alexander and the Grecian rulers that followed him was the political ambition to dominate others. The leopard also had four heads, which represented the four Grecian generals who divided up the Grecian territory among themselves after Alexander's death. The third beast, then, was man's attempt to rule of the world on the basis of selfish political ambition rather than a desire to please God.

D. The Dreadful Beast with Ten Horns (7:7, 8, 19-25) - Political Tyranny

The fourth beast in Daniel's vision was a dreadful, terrifying, strong monster, different than any of the other beasts. It had great iron teeth to devour the nations; the iron teeth are reminiscent of the iron legs of the image in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar. The iron teeth and legs are related to the Roman Empire that followed the Grecian Empire. This beast represented the attributes of the preceding empires combined with a new element of political tyranny. It was programmed to produce a political monster never before experienced by mankind. This political beast under the armies of Rome would smash all opposition and exercise unrestrained might and power. This beast also had ten horns on its head, representing ten future kings and their kingdoms that will arise out of the old Roman Empire. In the midst of the ten horns a little horn will arise that will pluck up three of the ten horns. This little horn had eyes like a man and had a mouth that blasphemed God. The little horn represents the future Antichrist, which will revive the old Roman Empire and bring the entire world under his tyrannical rule during the second half the seven-year Tribulation. His government will be developed into a system where all people will be forced to worship him or be killed. This is not pessimism; this is God's prophetic revelation! The fourth beast is a combination of all of the atrocities of man wrapped up in one "utopian" government which will oppose all that God is and all that He stands for. Antichrist will be the god of this world and multitudes will follow him. God did not tell when this will happen, but He did tell what will happen.

We must understand that man's attempts at governing himself are human schemes, which will degenerate. No matter how attractive a political system may appear, none can succeed without submission to God. When He controls us, He will give us success. We must daily surrender to God's authority and serve Him in the work that is eternal.

III. God's Kingdom (7:9-14, 18, 22, 27)

God's kingdom on earth will not be instituted until all other kingdoms are judged. This judgment will fall specifically upon the fourth beast (Rome) in its revived form with Antichrist as its king (7:9-12; cf. Rev 19:19ff). With the destruction of this empire, the cumulative aspects of the other kingdoms will also end; Christ will be given a Kingdom that will never be destroyed (7:13-14) and His followers will reign with Him (7:18, 22, 27).

We must be born again by the Spirit of God to enter God's kingdom (Jn 3:3). To do this, we must receive Jesus Christ (Jn 1:12, 13). Only those who are born into God's family will rule and reign with Christ (Rom 8:16, 17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27; 3:20, 21). Until He comes we must remain faithful to Him and His Word and lead others to receive Jesus as their Savior and King. His reign will be righteous, just and eternal.

SUBMIT TO GOD'S RULE NOW AND YOU WILL REIGN WITH CHRIST IN THE FUTURE.