

*A Vision of the Future: Pain & Judgment*  
Daniel 7:1-12

*"Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs."*  
Jonathan Edwards

**Introduction:** Anxiety comes when we DON'T know the future...*what will tomorrow look like? Will things stay the same? How about our kids? State? Country?* In Daniel 7, anxiety came Daniel when he DID realize the future. Daniel 7 marks a transition in the book, and in some ways provides a bookend with chapter 2. We've read and studied the dreams that Daniel had interpreted for others, but now he received one for himself that left him asking questions (v. 16), greatly alarmed (v. 28), and flush (v. 28). What he was privy to was what EW Heaton said, "*It would be no exaggeration to say that this chapter is one of the most important passages in the Old Testament*". Why? Daniel 7 gives a sweep of human history from the time of Daniel to the return of Christ, the judgment of the entire world, and the setting up of the eternal, universal kingdom and rule of Jesus with His saints. If Daniel were thinking of history only in his lifetime or simply getting the people of Israel back to Jerusalem, he was given far more than he could have imagined. While this dream filled him with alarm, it also was designed to give him **confidence** in the ultimate plan of God so that he could live with **courage** in the present.

We've stated before that studying through prophetic or apocalyptic passages of Scripture can be **intimidating**, especially as some want to change the way they interpret these passages, moving away from a **literal** interpretive grid for an allegorical one. But if we continue to take these passages literally, and interpret them consistently, we begin to see more **clarity** than **mystery**, as God intended His Word to be understood through the work of the Spirit and the mind of Christ. Most are intrigued by the **timing of the future**, in terms of **dates and answering the "when" question** of Christ's return. God is less concerned about giving us the times and seasons as He is the big picture, the fact that we have **hope in the future**, that we are to be united in this anticipation (1 Thess. 1:9-10), and not divide over things like dates or even specific sequences. We want to always be gracious in disagreement and humble in our convictions, and these are especially needed in understanding prophecy. But these passages are NOT throwaways, nor should they be neglected, even though at first blush they may seem overwhelming (my dad and I talked this week and he gave me the "chapter 7 is tough...I'm going to read it more this week...but, good luck" speech! ) Grappling with these chapters gives us insight into God's plan, confidence in His trustworthiness, and hope in His ultimate rule.

**A Startling Dream (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.*

As we finished the narrative portion of Daniel, we went all the way to the fall of Babylon and the conquering by Medo-Persia under Cyrus, and we saw Daniel get pulled out of the lion's den in his mid 80's. Now, in chapter 7, we go back in time a bit to the first year of Belshazzar, which according to the Nabonidus Chronicles, took place in the third year of the reign of Nabonidus. This would be **553 B.C.**, or **fourteen years before the feast of chapter 5 and the fall of Babylon**. Daniel would have been around 67 years old.

Now, the **purpose or reason** for why this dream was given, or why it was given at this point, is not given, but some reasons seem pretty clear.

- **It was a reminder that God was in control, even in the midst of governmental transitions** - Daniel had a relationship with Nebuchadnezzar, had seen some stability

with him, but now a new regime was in place in Babylon. Daniel needed to remember that God was securely in power, and that all things that happened were an unfolding of **His plan**, that he was not caught off guard, nor was He surprised or usurped.

- **Call for endurance** - If Daniel ever thought about fleeing or giving up, it would have happened in *starting over* with a new ruler. But the key to **living as an exile and a mindset of a stranger on this earth** is NOT to run when things change but rather to endure, to bear up under, and continue on.
- **It's gonna get worse before it gets worse...then it will get better** - This seems to be the reality of understanding history moving forward: things will get worse, more pain is coming (but at least there will also be persecution!), but THEN it will usher in a glorious Kingdom.
- **Just enough detail given to see the BIG PICTURE** - Again, we are intrigued by the details for sure. When I was just out of college the "LEFT BEHIND" books came out and sold like crazy, since it gave some narrative detail to the symbols and vagueness of prophecy. Daniel saw all that happened in his dream and asked an angel what was the truth concerning all of it (v. 16). He was given the interpretation, which have the grand sweep but left out details. What is often left out of our understanding are **specific dates and historical events**, which I believe is to ensure that we would 1) Walk by faith, and 2) Live with anticipation. Every generation SHOULD believe they are living in the last days and live with a **joyful look** to the return of Christ, which motivates us to LIVE each day.

### **Ferocious Beasts** (2-7)

*.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 10 horns.*

There are 3 main scenes of this dream: 4 beasts come up out of the sea, a courtroom drama of judgment, and the giving of a 5th Kingdom to the son of man. We will focus on the first two today and look at the third next week.

In chapter 2 we were introduced to a great **statue** made up of four distinctive parts with different metals, representing 4 different, literal, earthly, historically sourced, grand kingdoms that ruled the world at a particular time in history: **Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece, and Rome**. Here in Daniel 7, we have another image that describes the same kingdoms:

1) **Lion with Eagles wings (Babylon)** - Note that with all of these beasts, they are "like" the animal, since a there is no such thing as a lion with wings (or a "liger" for that matter) in nature. But this was a definite symbol for Babylon, as Nebuchadnezzar was symbolized as a lion in Jer. 4:7, 49:19, 22; 50:17, 44, and an eagle in Jer. 49:22; Lam 4:19, Ezek. 17:3, and Hab. 1:8. Ruins found in Babylon depict winged lions, even engraved on the famous Ishtar Gate of the city. And although not explicitly stated, the lion with the wings plucked off and

given the mind of a man is exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar in his humbling and restoration in chapter 4.

**2) Bear raised on one side with three ribs in its mouth (Medo-Persia)** - Cyrus' nation was known for its ferocity in battle and great size. The bear was raised up on one side, the greater side representing Persian and the lesser side Media (see Daniel 8:20 as the ram representing the nation had 2 horns, one larger than the other). The bear had **3 ribs** in its mouth, which most likely represents Medo-Persia's 3 great conquests - 1) Babylon (539 B.C), 2) Lydia (546 B.C.) and Egypt (525 B.C). The bear was told to "**Arise and devour much flesh**", and their domination stretched from Egypt and the Aegean Sea on the west to the Indus river on the east. More territory was controlled by this empire than any other up until that time.

**3) Leopard with four heads and four wings (Greece)** - This is an apt description of Greece under the rule of Alexander, who invaded Asia Minor in 334 B.C and within 10 short years had conquered Medo-Persia all the way to the borders of India. His military fervor was swift and effective to conquer the four corners of the known world. But in **323 B.C Alexander died**, and his united kingdom was split into 4 parts; 1) **Antipater** gained control of Greece and Macedonia, 2) **Lysimachus** ruled Thrace and a large part of Asia Minor, 3) **Seleucus Nicator** governed Syria, Babylon, and much of the Middle East, and 4) **Ptolemy Soter** controlled Egypt and Palestine. These were 4 generals of Alexander and the four heads of the swift leopard.

**4) Dreadfully strong beast with iron teeth and 10 horns (Rome)** - This fourth beast could not be identified, which sets it apart from the others. It was strong, iron clad, and devoured and broke in pieces all that stood in its path. This is clearly referring to Rome, which already was seen this way in 2:40. Rome was dominant in the world and influential into the 400's A.D, and though it no longer exists in a visible, united form, it will **make a comeback** with it's 10 horns. **Horns** are used in Scripture to symbolize kings or kingdoms (Rev. 13:1, 17:12; Ps. 132:17; Zech 1:18) These horns are connected to this empire, much like the 10 toes in Daniel 2. Some have thought this could have all been fulfilled in the Roman Empire in the last centuries before Jesus, but John received a vision in Revelation 17:12 that uses the same imagery to show something YET TO COME. These 10 will be LIKE Rome, will come out of Rome, but will be future.

Now, this is all ground we've covered back in Daniel 2. But now Daniel was given more, the next part of the story, the next unfolding of redemptive history. It is here that our intrigue grows.

#### **A Threatening Horn (8)**

*I considered the horns, and behold, there came among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in his horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.*

As Daniel was deep in thought about the 10 horns, he was introduced to a **main character of his dream and of future events, a little horn**. This is a symbol of a real ruler, who starts out small but becomes **stout** or large in size and rank (v. 20). This little horn will rule the other 10 horns, and will pluck out 3 of them. He will be ruler of this final expression of Rome, will go to war with the saints, will receive worship falsely, and is known by another familiar term: **Antichrist**. Though not an exhaustive study, Daniel is given a description of this savvy ruler. What is he like? How does he get to be so powerful? Much like world dictators who have caused havoc in world history, he will have a combination of personality, resource, and opportunity. Antichrist is no different.

1) **Shrewd and Subtle Politically** - If a political leader starts out small, it's difficult to exert much force right away. The idea in verse 8 is that **3 of the nations of 10** were gradually replaced, pushed out by something new, not by violence but by progressive movement, without revolution. Before Adolph Hitler took over Germany by force he took it over gradually by influence and rhetoric. According to Daniel 11:21, he will be able to bring about peace using **flattery**, the arrogant tool of dictators. In 9:27 he will make a strong covenant bringing peace in the Middle East and make a deal with Israel. This kind of action is done NOT by the strongest of people physically, but by the shrewdly intelligent who can get people to do what they want to do, to dance to the beat they drop. This way of operating reminded me of a time when I was in Rome with several friends and we saw the Pope drive by in the Popemobile. We were in line with my buddy Burt who out-weighed and muscled me by a good measure, and as the Pope got closer, Burt got moved back several feet from his prime place in line by none other than 2 dainty nuns who were not to be deterred to see their treasured leader. Not mighty, but determined. Not necessarily the most obvious, but the most effective.

2) **Insightful** - The horn had "eyes of a man", which in Scripture is used as instruments of **observation, learning, intelligence, and wisdom**. (Zech. 3:9, 4:10; Rev. 4:6, 5:6). He will be clever, able to problem solve and be seen as one who could solve the worlds problems.

3) **Effective Orator** - If you want to secure a job in any field, learn how to communicate clearly and be able to speak well extemporaneously. This man will speak of "great things" (v. 20), or speak **boastfully**. An intelligent man with arrogant motives is the recipe for sure disaster. He will not only sway people by his boasts and flatteries, but will also speak **blasphemies against the most high** (7:25; Rev. 13:5). He is full of audacity since he will believe he is equal to the most high, or even above him, since no one else would dare be that bold.

4) **Rule by might** - The fourth kingdom will "**devour the whole earth**" (v. 23), and will use this might to wage war against the saints of God (Rev. 13:4,7). He will literally "wear out the saints" (v. 25) of the most high, waging war through oppression, economic pressure, and cut off religious freedom. This is the pattern of every world dictator: start with flattery, line oneself up as being "for" people, helping solve their problems, sway their mind and heart, and then impose his will over them.

5) **Receive Worship as a False Christ** - Again, the path of any dictator who is anti-Christ is the same...they believe themselves to be a god. Nebuchadnezzar began to believe it. Herod in Acts 12:20-25 believed it. Give a person unlimited power and opportunity, and they will begin to believe they **actually have power of their own**. Daniel 7:25 says that the little horn will use this self-deification to change the times and the law, which will most certainly entail waging war on religion or the worship of the true God and overthrowing of God's moral law, making sin seem good and moral purity seem evil. Today, we have the "spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:3) in our world. Though we have not seen the little horn yet, the spirit that embodies him is alive and well. Any and all who do not confess Jesus are not from God, and thus are in it for themselves. Our enemy is waging war against God, His people, and His church. It should take NO ONE by surprise when God's church is targeted, when marriage is attacked, and immorality is elevated to normal. We are living in the endtimes, the time of the Gentiles, the time between Christ's first appearing and second coming. This is what we face and will continue to face, and it was what gave Daniel concern.

6) **His time will be limited** - Two really important pieces of information. **First**, according to what we know, the church will not be around when the Antichrist comes to power. Daniel 7:25 says his effectiveness will be for a time, times, and a half of time. If time equates to a year, the his time of destruction will be for 3 1/2 years, of which the church will be raptured

beforehand (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and those who come to Christ in the Tribulation will be left. 2) **He will not win**, and that brings us to the final scene we'll deal with today.

### A Smokey Courtroom (9-14)

*As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, 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.*

*I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And 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.*

Daniel looked and saw a throne placed on the ground where the Ancient of Days took His seat. God the Father takes up His throne as the Great Judge (or Chief Justice). He wears a beaming white garment symbolizing his holiness, wool like hair that shows his wisdom, has a throne that declares His authority, and has fiery flames with wheels shooting fire, displaying his judgment. A river of fire was flowing before him and he was surrounded by a myriad (100,000,000) angels who serve at his call and who are ready to come with Him in judgment (2 Thess. 1:7). The beast, which is both represented as the kingdom and the horn, is spewing out boastful, audacious, and blasphemous words toward the Ancient of Days, and he will be silenced forever when he is killed, his body destroyed, and will be burned with fire. I want you to notice one important point, however, as we close. As this courtroom drama unfolds, God sat in judgment and **opens the books**. This is exactly what happens at the **Great White Throne Judgment** in Revelation 20, where God judges all who had died, great and small. There are two books. One book contained all deeds that we have done in this earth, every sin we knowingly committed, hid, concealed, or covered up. Sins that forgot about, omitted, or committed in our heart, imagination, desire, or thoughts. The world is judged by **what it had done**. There was another book, the book of life. If one's name was written in the book of life, they would not be judged the same way. What would the first book look like when it was opened for those whose names were in the book of life? The first book would be opened, and there would be a huge, written word across all the sins found in the book:

## **CANCELLED!!!!**

*"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."*

Colossians 2:13-14

Now, coming back to the courtroom of Daniel 7, we see that after the beast and the nations have their dominion taken away, it will usher in a **new kingdom**, one that will be ruled by Christ. Jesus not only saved us from our sin, but was given the right to rule the earth. That is all good news. That not only motivates us to **repent** today, but to live for Him each and every day, even in a world that is actively opposed to Christ, and one that will get worse before it gets worse, but then it will get gloriously better!