

The Book of Daniel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: The Four Beasts and the Son of Man

Daniel 7:1–28

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries heavy doctrinal weight, second only to chapter nine, because the vision of the Son of Man receiving an everlasting kingdom is one of the great Messianic peaks of the Old Testament, and it is widely distorted by end-times speculation. Your central task is to help students see, on the authority of Scripture, that the “one like a son of man” is Jesus Christ, that the kingdom He receives is His present, everlasting reign begun at His first coming and exaltation, and that this kingdom is shared with His people, the saints, as the church and reign of Christ, not a future earthly political empire.

Make the identification of the Son of Man airtight from the New Testament itself. Jesus deliberately took this title as His favorite self-designation, and at His trial He applied Daniel 7:13 directly to Himself, telling the high priest he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:61–62; Matthew 26:64). The apostles proclaimed that this exaltation has already happened: Christ has been raised, seated at God's right hand far above all rule and authority, and made Lord of all (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22). The dominion Daniel saw given to the Son of Man is the reign Christ exercises now.

Handle the beasts and the little horn within the historical horizon of the text and the New Testament, and resist the temptation to turn the chapter into a coded timetable of modern political events. The point of the beasts is the beastly nature of human empire under God's judgment, and the point of the little horn is that real, fearsome opposition to God's people nonetheless stands under God's sovereign judgment and is finally destroyed. The lesson is also deeply formational: it calls students to keep their eyes on the throne rather than the beasts, to endure when evil seems to win, and to live as citizens of an unshakable kingdom in a world of raging powers.

Question 1

Student Question:

Daniel sees four great beasts rising from a turbulent sea, representing a succession of human empires (7:3–7, 7:17). What does it mean that heaven portrays the proud kingdoms of men as beasts? How does this vision expose the true nature of earthly power apart from God (compare Psalm 2:1–4)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the striking imagery: heaven portrays the great empires of history not as glittering statues but as beasts rising from a churning, wind-tossed sea (7:2–7). The sea in Scripture often pictures chaos and the restless nations (Isaiah 57:20), and the beasts picture the predatory, devouring nature of human power. This is history seen from God’s side.

Help students grasp the theological honesty of this picture. Chapter two showed the empires as an impressive statue, the way they appear to human eyes. Chapter seven shows the same empires as beasts, the way they appear to heaven. Both are true, but the beast vision exposes what the statue conceals: that the kingdoms of men, for all their grandeur, have a way of trampling, devouring, and oppressing.

Connect this to the broader biblical assessment of worldly power apart from God. The nations rage and the rulers take counsel against the Lord, “he who sits in the heavens laughs” (Psalm 2:1–4). Earthly power that does not bow to God tends toward the beastly: arrogant, violent, self-exalting. The vision strips away the glamour and shows the true nature underneath.

Set up the contrast that the whole chapter is building. Above the churning sea and its beasts, the vision will reveal a throne, a court, and a Son of Man. The beasts are real and frightening, but they are not ultimate. The point of showing them first is to make the throne, when it appears, shine all the brighter.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Human empires portrayed by heaven as beasts rising from chaos (Daniel 7:2–7).
- The sea as a biblical image of chaos and the restless nations (Isaiah 57:20).
- The beastly, devouring nature of earthly power apart from God.
- The contrast between the statue (man’s view) and the beasts (heaven’s view).
- God enthroned above the raging of the nations (Psalm 2:1–4).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does heaven portray the great empires as beasts?
- What does the beast imagery expose about earthly power apart from God?
- How does this picture differ from the way empires see themselves?

Question 2

Student Question:

We are easily impressed and easily frightened by worldly power, whether political, cultural, or financial. Where do the “beasts” of our own day, the powers and crises that dominate the news, tend to capture your attention and stir your fear? How can this vision help you see them with clearer eyes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question brings the beasts into the present. Every age has its beasts, the powers and crises that dominate attention and stir fear: political upheavals, cultural movements, economic threats, the relentless churn of the news. Like Daniel, we can find our gaze fixed on the turbulent sea and its monsters.

Help students notice how worldly power both impresses and frightens us. We are tempted either to be dazzled by it, treating political or cultural power as the thing that will save or doom us, or to be terrified by it, living in anxiety as though the beasts were in charge. Both responses forget the throne.

Offer the corrective the vision provides. Daniel's vision does not deny that the beasts are real or fearsome; it sets them under the throne of the Ancient of Days. The cure for being mastered by the beasts is not to ignore them but to see them rightly, as powers that rage for a season but answer to God and stand under His judgment.

Move toward a concrete reorientation. Encourage students to identify which beast most captures their attention and fear, and to deliberately set it under the throne, reminding themselves that God reigns over it. The aim is not naivety about the world's dangers but freedom from being ruled by fear of them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The beasts of every age: the powers and crises that command our fear.
- Being dazzled or terrified by worldly power as a forgetting of the throne.
- Seeing the beasts rightly: real but under God's judgment.
- Freedom from fear through fixing the eyes on God's reign.

Discussion Prompts

- Which 'beasts' of our day most capture your attention and fear?
- Do you tend to be dazzled by worldly power or terrified by it?
- How can you set a fear under the throne of God this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

In the midst of the beasts, Daniel sees the throne of the Ancient of Days, surrounded by myriads, with the court seated and the books opened in judgment (7:9–10). What does this scene reveal about God's sovereignty over history and His coming judgment of all earthly powers? Why is it significant that the throne appears precisely when the beasts seem to be winning?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to the throne room scene in verses 9 and 10, one of the most majestic in all Scripture. The Ancient of Days takes His seat, clothing white as snow, throne of flaming fire, a river of fire

flowing before Him, a thousand thousands serving Him and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before Him. The court sits in judgment, and the books are opened.

Help students feel the timing of this vision. It appears precisely when the beasts seem to be winning, when the little horn is speaking great things and making war on the saints. Just when earthly power looks invincible, heaven opens and reveals the throne that was there all along. The beasts have their hour; God has His court.

Draw out the doctrine of God's sovereignty and judgment. The throne scene declares that history is not heading toward the triumph of the beasts but toward the judgment of God. Every empire, every oppressor, every proud power will finally stand before this court and give account. The books are opened; nothing is forgotten or unaddressed.

Apply this as both comfort and warning. For the oppressed people of God, the throne is comfort: their cause is not lost, for the Judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25). For the proud powers of the world, it is warning: their day in court is coming. The throne reframes everything the beasts are doing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The throne of the Ancient of Days and the certainty of divine judgment (Daniel 7:9–10).
- God's sovereignty revealed precisely when the beasts seem to be winning.
- History moving toward God's judgment, not the triumph of evil.
- The opened books: nothing forgotten or left unaddressed (Revelation 20:12).
- The throne as comfort to the oppressed and warning to the proud.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the throne appear just when the beasts seem to be winning?
- What does the heavenly court reveal about the end of history?
- How is God's judgment both a comfort and a warning?

Question 4

Student Question:

The little horn made war on the saints and seemed, for a time, to prevail against them (7:21, 7:25). When have you felt that evil or opposition was winning and that faithfulness was a losing cause? How does the certainty that God's judgment will set everything right help you endure when wrong appears to triumph?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question addresses the painful experience of watching evil seem to win. The little horn made war on the saints and prevailed against them for a time (7:21, 7:25). Daniel

does not pretend this is easy; he acknowledges that there are seasons when the people of God are worn down and faithfulness looks like a losing cause.

Help students name their own experiences of this. We watch injustice flourish, truth mocked, the faithful overlooked while the ruthless advance. We can feel that holding to Christ is a losing bet, that the beasts are simply stronger. These feelings are honest, and the vision does not scold them; it answers them.

Offer the answer the vision gives: the prevailing of the little horn is real but temporary, granted only “for a time, times, and half a time” (7:25), a limited season, after which the court sits and the dominion is taken away. Evil’s victories are always on a short lease. The judgment of God will set everything right.

Move toward endurance. The point is not to deny that evil sometimes wins battles, but to fix the believer’s hope on the war’s certain outcome. Encourage students to endure in a present hardship by lifting their eyes to the throne and the coming judgment, where every wrong will be addressed and the saints will inherit the kingdom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real but temporary prevailing of evil against the saints (Daniel 7:21, 25).
- Evil’s victories held on a short lease under God’s sovereign limit.
- The certainty of God’s judgment setting all things right (Genesis 18:25).
- Endurance fueled by hope in the war’s settled outcome (Revelation 2:10).

Discussion Prompts

- When have you felt that evil or opposition was winning?
- How does the limited ‘time, times, and half a time’ encourage you?
- How does the coming judgment help you endure present wrongs?

Question 5

Student Question:

Daniel sees “one like a son of man” come with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, receiving dominion, glory, and an everlasting kingdom that all peoples should serve (7:13–14). Who is this Son of Man, and how do we know? Consider that Jesus took this exact title for Himself and applied this very scene to His own glory and coming (Mark 14:61–62; Matthew 26:64), and that He now reigns at God’s right hand (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22).

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a doctrinal high point: the identification of the Son of Man. Daniel sees “one like a son of man” coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, receiving dominion, glory, and a

kingdom that all peoples should serve, a dominion that is everlasting and shall not pass away (7:13–14). The question of who this is must be answered from Scripture itself.

Show that Jesus settled the matter definitively. Son of Man was His favorite self-designation, used dozens of times in the Gospels. And at the climactic moment of His trial, when the high priest demanded to know if He was the Christ, Jesus answered by applying Daniel 7 directly to Himself: “you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61–62; Matthew 26:64). The high priest tore his robes precisely because he understood this as a claim to the divine glory of Daniel’s vision.

Show that the apostles proclaimed this exaltation as already accomplished. At Pentecost, Peter declared that God raised Jesus and exalted Him to His right hand, making Him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36). Paul wrote that God seated Christ at His right hand “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,” with “all things under his feet” (Ephesians 1:20–22). The dominion Daniel saw given to the Son of Man is the reign Christ exercises now.

Help students feel the wonder of this. Centuries before Bethlehem, Daniel saw a human figure approach the throne of God and receive an everlasting kingdom. That figure has a name: Jesus. The carpenter of Nazareth, crucified and risen, is the Son of Man of Daniel’s vision, reigning at the right hand of the Ancient of Days. The Old Testament hope and the New Testament fulfillment meet in Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Son of Man as Jesus Christ, established from His own words (Mark 14:61–62; Matthew 26:64).
- Son of Man as Jesus’ deliberate, favorite self-designation.
- The exaltation already accomplished: Christ raised and made Lord (Acts 2:33–36).
- Christ seated far above all rule and authority, all things under His feet (Ephesians 1:20–22).
- The everlasting dominion of Daniel 7 as the present reign of Christ.
- The unity of Old Testament hope and New Testament fulfillment in Jesus.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we know the Son of Man is Jesus?
- Why did the high priest react so strongly to Jesus quoting Daniel 7?
- What does it mean that the dominion Daniel saw is Christ’s reign now?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus, the Son of Man, has already received an everlasting kingdom and reigns now over all things. How does it change your daily life to know that the One who holds all authority in heaven

and on earth is the same Jesus who loves you and gave Himself for you? What fear or worry would loosen its grip if you truly rested in His reign?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the reign of the Son of Man to daily life. The same Jesus who holds all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), who reigns above every beast and power, is the One who loves us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). His sovereignty and His love are joined in one person.

Help students feel the practical comfort of this union. The One in charge of everything is not a distant force but the Savior who bled for them. The hand that holds the universe is the hand that was pierced. This means that the power running the cosmos is on the side of those who belong to Christ, working all things for their good (Romans 8:28, 8:32).

Press how this loosens the grip of fear. So many of our anxieties assume that the world is governed by impersonal forces, blind chance, or hostile powers. The reign of the loving Son of Man answers each fear: nothing reaches us that has not passed the throne where our Savior sits. We are not at the mercy of the beasts.

Move toward one concrete worry. Encourage students to name a specific fear or worry and to set it consciously under the reign of the loving Christ, asking what would change if they truly believed He rules over it. The aim is a peace rooted not in denial of trouble but in the lordship of the One who loves them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The union of Christ's sovereign authority and His self-giving love (Matthew 28:18; Galatians 2:20).
- The pierced hand as the hand that holds the universe.
- All things working for the good of those who are Christ's (Romans 8:28, 32).
- Fear loosened by the reign of the loving Savior.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change daily life that the Ruler of all loves you?
- What worry would loosen its grip if you rested in Christ's reign?
- How are Christ's power and His love joined for your comfort?

Question 7

Student Question:

Twice the vision insists that the Son of Man's kingdom "shall not be destroyed" and "shall not pass away," and that the saints will receive and possess the kingdom (7:14, 7:18, 7:27). What does it mean that the kingdom given to Christ is shared with His people, the saints? How does

this present, everlasting kingdom relate to the church and the reign of Christ now, rather than to a future earthly political empire?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to the shared kingdom. The vision insists that the kingdom is given not only to the Son of Man but, through Him, to His people: “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever” (7:18), and “the kingdom and the dominion... shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High” (7:27). The reign of Christ is shared with those who belong to Him.

Help students understand this rightly, against the backdrop of the whole book. The kingdom given to the Son of Man is the same kingdom prophesied in chapter two as the stone that becomes a mountain, the kingdom set up in the days of the Roman kings that shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). It is the church and reign of Christ, established at His first coming, into which believers have already been brought (Colossians 1:13).

Make the crucial doctrinal point explicitly. This kingdom is present and spiritual, not a future earthly political empire. The saints possess the kingdom now, as those who reign with Christ and belong to His unshakable reign (Revelation 1:6, 1:9; Hebrews 12:28). The everlasting kingdom is not waiting to be set up; it has come in Christ, and His people share in it.

Draw out what it means to share Christ’s kingdom. It does not mean political power or earthly dominion; the King Himself said His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). It means belonging to the reign of Christ, serving under His lordship, sharing His victory over sin and death, and awaiting the day when that reign is fully revealed. The saints’ possession of the kingdom is a present reality with a glorious future consummation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom shared with the saints through the Son of Man (Daniel 7:18, 27).
- The same kingdom as the unshakable kingdom of Daniel 2:44, set up in Christ.
- A present, spiritual kingdom, the church and reign of Christ, not a future political empire (John 18:36).
- Believers already brought into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).
- The saints reigning with Christ now, awaiting the full revealing (Revelation 1:6, 9).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the kingdom is shared with the saints?
- How does this kingdom relate to the stone kingdom of Daniel 2?
- Why is it important that this kingdom is present and spiritual, not future and political?

Question 8

Student Question:

If you truly belong to a kingdom that can never be destroyed, that reality is meant to reorder your priorities and loosen your grip on the things that can be destroyed. What is one earthly thing you are holding too tightly, and how does your place in Christ's unshakable kingdom free you to hold it more loosely and live more generously?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the unshakable kingdom into the student's priorities. If we truly belong to a kingdom that can never be destroyed, then we are freed to hold loosely the things that can. The believer's security rests in what cannot be lost, which liberates us from clutching at what can.

Help students see how the reverse works in practice. We grip earthly things tightly, money, status, comfort, control, precisely because we have invested our security in them. The more we treat a perishable thing as our anchor, the more anxiously we clutch it. The unshakable kingdom offers a better anchor, and so a looser grip.

Connect this to generosity and freedom. Those who know their treasure is secure in Christ's kingdom can afford to be generous, to take risks for God, to let go of lesser things, because their true wealth is untouchable (Matthew 6:19–21). Tight-fisted anxiety is the mark of a heart anchored in the perishable; open-handed freedom is the mark of a heart anchored in the kingdom.

Move toward one concrete thing. Encourage students to name a single earthly thing they are holding too tightly, and to take a step toward holding it more loosely and living more generously, grounded in the security of their place in Christ's kingdom. The aim is the freedom that comes from treasure that cannot be destroyed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Security in the unshakable kingdom freeing us to hold earthly things loosely (Hebrews 12:28).
- Anxious clutching as the fruit of anchoring security in the perishable.
- Generosity and freedom flowing from treasure secure in Christ (Matthew 6:19–21).
- Open-handed living as the mark of a kingdom-anchored heart.

Discussion Prompts

- What earthly thing are you holding too tightly right now?
- How does belonging to an unshakable kingdom loosen that grip?
- What would more generous, open-handed living look like for you?

Question 9

Student Question:

The vision presents the fourth beast and the little horn as real, fearsome powers that nonetheless stand under God's judgment and are finally destroyed, while the saints inherit the kingdom (7:23–27). It is sobering that some have torn this chapter from its moorings, reading the little horn as a coded prophecy of modern end-times politics. How can we handle Daniel 7 faithfully, keeping it within the horizon of the text and the New Testament, focused on God's sovereignty and the reign of Christ, rather than turning it into a newspaper timetable of current events? And why is it crucial to see that the kingdom given to the saints is the church and the present reign of Christ, not a future earthly political empire?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it must address head-on the abuse of this chapter by end-times speculation. The fourth beast, with its ten horns and the little horn that speaks great things and makes war on the saints, is real and fearsome, yet it stands under God's judgment and is finally destroyed, while the saints inherit the kingdom (7:23–27). The temptation is to tear these details from their moorings and read them as a coded prophecy of modern political events.

Teach students the faithful approach: keep the chapter within the horizon of the text and the New Testament. The beasts represent a historic succession of empires, most naturally Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, the same sweep as chapter two. The little horn pictures an arrogant power that opposes God and oppresses His people within that horizon. The decisive point is not the precise identification of each horn, but the message: every such power, however fearsome, stands under God's judgment and will be destroyed, while God's people inherit the everlasting kingdom.

Name and reject the newspaper approach plainly and kindly. Much popular teaching treats Daniel 7 as a secret timetable, matching the horns to current nations, politicians, and headlines, and recalculating with each news cycle. This method has been wrong in every generation that has tried it, and it distracts from the chapter's actual message. Daniel 7 is not a coded calendar of modern events; it is a revelation of God's sovereignty over all history and the triumph of Christ and His saints.

State the crucial positive truth clearly. The kingdom given to the saints is the church and the present reign of Christ, not a future earthly political empire. We have seen that this is the same kingdom set up in the days of the Roman kings (Daniel 2:44), the reign Christ exercises now at God's right hand (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22). To project the kingdom into a future earthly political reign, as premillennial and dispensational teaching does, is to miss that the Son of Man has already received His dominion and that His people already share in His unshakable kingdom.

Bring it home pastorally. The right use of Daniel 7 is not anxious chart-making but settled confidence. Whatever beasts rage in our own day, they stand under the throne we have seen,

and they will not have the last word. The Son of Man reigns, His judgment is sure, and the saints will inherit the kingdom. That is the message Daniel was given, and it is enough to steady God's people in any age.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The beasts and little horn handled within the historical horizon of the text and the New Testament.
- The message of judgment on every God-opposing power, not the identification of modern nations.
- Rejection of the newspaper method that reads Daniel 7 as a coded timetable of current events.
- The kingdom of the saints as the church and present reign of Christ, not a future political empire.
- The same unshakable kingdom of Daniel 2:44, already established in Christ (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22).
- Rejection of premillennial and dispensational projection of the kingdom into the future.
- Settled confidence in Christ's reign rather than anxious chart-making.

Discussion Prompts

- How can we handle the little horn faithfully rather than as a modern timetable?
- Why has the newspaper method of reading prophecy failed in every generation?
- Why is it crucial that the saints' kingdom is the present reign of Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole vision, from the beasts of the sea to the Son of Man receiving an everlasting kingdom. Name one specific way the truth that Jesus reigns now, and that you share in His unshakable kingdom, is reshaping how you will live, hope, and face the powers of this world in the coming week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question calls for a personal, concrete response. The aim is to move students from the grandeur of the vision to a changed life under the reign of the Son of Man. Ask them to look back across the chapter and name where the Spirit is pressing on them.

Help them gather the threads: the beastly nature of worldly power, the throne that appears when the beasts seem to win, the certainty of God's judgment, the reign of the loving Son of Man, and the unshakable kingdom shared with the saints. Ask which of these is speaking most directly to them.

Refuse vagueness. “Trust God more” is not a plan. “This week I will keep my eyes on the throne instead of this beast, endure this hardship in hope of God’s judgment, or hold this earthly thing more loosely” is concrete and livable. The best answers will be specific and personal.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ. The Son of Man who received the everlasting kingdom is Jesus, who reigns now and will be revealed in glory. We face the powers of this world not as frightened subjects of the beasts but as citizens of His unshakable kingdom, kept by the King who loves us and is forming His own steadiness and hope in us (Ephesians 1:20–22; Philippians 1:6).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of study as life reordered under the reign of the Son of Man (Romans 8:29).
- Christ the Son of Man reigning now and to be revealed in glory.
- Citizenship in the unshakable kingdom shaping how we face the world.
- Concrete, named obedience as the fruit of genuine study.

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this vision is God pressing most on your heart?
- What is one specific way you will live under Christ’s reign this week?
- How does the reign of the Son of Man change the way you face the world?