

The Book of Daniel

Lesson 7: The Four Beasts and the Son of Man -- Daniel 7:1-28

We have reached a turning point in the book. For six chapters we have watched Daniel interpret the dreams of kings. Now, suddenly, Daniel is the one dreaming, and the visions that come to him in the night are stranger and more terrible than anything Nebuchadnezzar saw. A great sea is churning under the winds of heaven, and up out of the chaos come four monstrous beasts, one after another, each more frightening than the last: a lion with eagle's wings, a lurching bear with ribs in its teeth, a leopard with four heads and four wings, and finally a thing so dreadful the vision has no animal to name it, with iron teeth and ten horns, devouring and trampling everything in its path.

It is a vision of human history seen from heaven's side, and from that vantage point the great empires of the world look less like glittering statues of gold and more like predatory beasts rising out of a dark and restless sea. There is something honest about this picture. The kingdoms of men, for all their grandeur, have a way of devouring and trampling. And as Daniel watches, a little horn comes up among the ten, with eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great things, making war on the saints and wearing them down. For a moment it seems the beasts will win, and the people of God will be ground to dust.

But then the scene changes, and heaven opens. Thrones are set in place, and the Ancient of Days takes His seat, His clothing white as snow, His throne flaming fire, ten thousand times ten thousand standing before Him. The court sits in judgment, the books are opened, and the dreadful beast is slain. The kingdoms of men have their day, but they do not have the last word. The last word belongs to the throne. And then comes the moment the whole vision has been building toward, the heart of the chapter and one of the mountain peaks of the Old Testament.

"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 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." Centuries before Bethlehem, Daniel saw Him: a human figure who approaches the throne of God and receives a kingdom that will never end. Jesus would take this very title, Son of Man, and make it His own. This lesson is about the One who reigns above all the beasts of history, and about the kingdom that He shares with all who are His.

Group Discussion: Daniel sees the great empires of history as beasts rising from a chaotic sea, while above them stands the throne of the Ancient of Days (7:2-10). How does seeing world history from heaven's vantage point, with God on the throne over every raging power, change the way we read the turmoil of our own times? What comfort and what challenge does it offer?

Personal Reflection: The vision moves from terrifying beasts to a throne of fire and a Son of Man receiving an everlasting kingdom. When you look at the troubles and powers of the world, where do your eyes tend to settle, on the beasts or on the throne? What would change in your daily peace if you learned to keep your eyes on the One who reigns?

Read Daniel 7:1–28

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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).
6. 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?
7. 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?

8. 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?

9. 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?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Mark 14:61–62, Jesus claims the Son of Man coming with the clouds before the high priest; Acts 2:33–36, Jesus exalted to God's right hand and made Lord and Christ; Ephesians 1:20–22, Christ seated far above all rule and authority, with all things under His feet; Philippians 2:9–11, the name above every name to which every knee will bow; Revelation 1:5–7, Jesus the ruler of kings, coming with the clouds.

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