



# Outlines in Bible Prophecy

## Daniel Chapter 7

- *The four night visions*
- *The Gentile empires*
- *The Ancient of days*
- *The Son of man & the Millennial Kingdom*

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## Introduction

When Daniel received the **four** night-visions recorded in this chapter, he was in Babylon under the rule of Belshazzar (c 553 BC). “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters” (v 1). These visions were brought about by *Daniel’s* desire to know what was to become of his own people. In this defining prophecy we therefore have not only the divine program destined for his people, but a blessed revelation of the One in whom their destiny rests – the Son of man and His glorious Millennial Kingdom.

## The four visions

### Four beasts emerge from the sea

The first night vision - **four beasts** emerging from a troubled **sea**, three of which are described (Dan 7:3).

“And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it.”

### The fourth beast - its 10 horns and a little horn

The second night vision – the **fourth beast** is described. It has **ten horns** and a **little horn rises** from among them.

“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things” (vv 7-8).

### The Ancient of days – His judicial glory

The third night vision – the **Ancient of days**.

“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time” (vv 9-12).

### The Son of Man - His governmental glory

The fourth night vision - One like the **Son of Man**

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (vv 13-14). This relates to the Millennial Kingdom on earth over which Christ as the Son of Man rules as King of kings and Lord of lords.

### Some general observations concerning these visions

1. The four beasts represent four kings and their kingdoms. This is explicitly stated in the passage (vv 17-23). "Thus he said, the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces" (v 23). We will refer to them as kingdoms.
2. These four kingdoms are Gentile in their *nationality*. They all emerge from the "sea." In prophecy the sea symbolizes the Gentile nations. "And he saith unto me, the waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Rev 17:15 cf Isa 17:12).
3. There is no warrant from this passage (or any other) to confine the "great sea" to the Mediterranean. It seems to refer to a universal sphere, the mass of Gentile humanity aroused by the four winds of heaven. These winds are judicial as in Jeremiah 49:36. "And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven."
4. In verse 17, these beasts are seen emerging from the "earth." This, too, refers to their origin, but now their *carnality* is in view. The earth symbolizes ungodliness.
5. We learn something about their *sequence*. They emerge out of the Gentile nations one after another. The expressions "after this" (twice used) and "were before it," together with the ordinal ranking of the kingdoms as "first", "second," "third" and "fourth," clearly indicate that they emerge successively from the Gentile population.
6. These kingdoms *replace* each other. They do not appear one after another and then coexist. Their replacement is intimated within the passage, in that we see the apparent demise of the first kingdom after which another emerges. The second kingdom is said to be given "dominion" – not "a" dominion as if it is part of a greater regime. In verse 7 the fourth beast is said to "break in pieces" and "stamp the residue" which can only refer to the utter replacement of the preceding kingdom.
7. Such replacement is consistent with their replacement taught in the Great Image of Daniel 2:36-43. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar, that "after thee" shall arise another kingdom. The language and context of Daniel 2 establishes that an emerging kingdom replaces the previous kingdom in world dominion. In Daniel 8 we also have an unambiguous reference to their succession. It is explicitly stated. The third kingdom – Greece, will overtake the second kingdom – Persia.
8. As noted, these visions in Daniel 7 present a parallel prophecy to the prophecy associated with the Great Image in Daniel Chapter 2. Chapter 7 focuses on the saints of the Most High God – Daniel's people and their standing in His mercy; their judgment under the Gentiles and their eventual blessing under the Son of Man during His millennial reign on earth. Daniel 2 focuses on the course of Gentiles kingdoms that have successive dominion in the world. Its character is essentially secular and governmental, whereas the character of Chapter 7 is essentially saintly and judicial.
9. These prophecies, it must be remembered, have nothing to do with the Church. They are all about Gentile rule and Israel, which has a distinct identity and destiny to the Church.

We have then, in this Chapter, the entire course of Gentile rule relative to Israel – God's firstborn nation. This period is known in Scripture as the **Times of the Gentiles**. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). It embraces Israel's subjugation by the Gentiles under the *Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman* empires through to the time of the *revived Roman Empire*, which will come into existence once this present Church Age has run its course. Because of its disobedience and unbelief, God has suspended the covenant blessings granted to Israel and placed it under Gentile dominion until the day of its restoration under Christ. In that day the nation will be restored and reunited under Christ and it will partake of the unconditional covenant promises through Him.

## The four beasts and the Gentile kingdoms of Daniel Chapter 7

### The first beast



We are told the **first** beast was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle, symbolizing regal might and mobility (v 4). It speaks of the all-conquering **Babylonian Empire**. Babylon is symbolized by Jeremiah as coming up against the Lord as a lion and an eagle (Jer 49:19, 22). In Daniel 7 its wings are seen to be plucked off; it was lifted up from the earth; it was made to stand upon its feet as a man and a man's heart was given to it. Exactly what this symbolism represents is difficult to say, but we suggest it speaks of the power of the Babylonian kingdom vested in a potentate – the man Nebuchadnezzar. That man, though great, eventually lost his power, as does a lion when it is made to stand on its hind legs and when it loses its "lion's heart"; so too an eagle when it loses its wings. In this we see the madness of Nebuchadnezzar and the demise of ancient Babylon.

### The second beast



The **second** beast was like a bear. It symbolizes the **Medo-Persian Empire**. This empire we know overtook the Babylonian empire in the days of Belshazzar – as prophesied. This was initially a "dual kingdom." However, we see the bear raised on one side corresponding to the later dominance of Persia under Cyrus. The three ribs in its mouth correspond to the three territories it conquered – *Babylon, Egypt and Assyria*. Its predacious nature is seen in that it "devours much flesh" (v 5).

### The third beast



The **third** beast was like a leopard. It had four wings and four heads. It symbolizes the **Greek Empire** under Alexander the Great. The wings suggest speed, the hallmark of Alexander's conquests. The four heads symbolize a four part "dominion," which refers to the division of the Greek empire by Alexander's four generals after his death. We can confirm this from secular history; better still we are informed of it in Daniel 8:22. "Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power."

### The fourth beast



We now come to the **fourth** beast which was **exceedingly dreadful**. Here we note a *double* prophecy. In the first instance it symbolizes the then *future* but now *historical Imperial Roman Empire*. Its large *iron teeth* to crush and devour correspond to the *legs of iron* of the Image in Daniel 2. In the second instance it symbolizes the *still future revived Roman Empire* in that it has **10** horns. These 10 horns correspond to the implicit 10 toes of the Great Image of Daniel 2, which symbolize the revived and confederated future Roman Empire. But now we have an additional revelation not given in Daniel 2, again establishing why this prophecy in Daniel 7 is in additional and complementary to the Great Image in Daniel 2.

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A **little horn** (vv 7-8) arises among the **10 horns** that emerged from the **fourth kingdom** (v 23). Horns symbolize kings and their kingdoms (v 23). This little horn represents the king of the revived Roman Empire. He is the Beast of Revelation 13:1, the **Antichrist**, the abomination that maketh desolate of Daniel 12. The passage concerning him is rich in symbolism and graphic in its expression.

“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it [i.e., before it in time]; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things” (Dan 7:7-8).

There are two vital observations in regard to the ten horns and the little horn.

1. The ten horns have their roots in the **fourth kingdom** which, as we have noted, was the now historical Imperial Roman Empire. This means that the ten horns derive their character and constitution from that empire and they constitute a revival of it – the revived Roman Empire.
2. The little horn arises from **among** these ten horns and, therefore, it too, has its root in the character and constitution of the historical Imperial Roman Empire. This little horn, as we have stated, is the supreme future ruler of the revived Roman Empire – the Antichrist.

(The little horn of Daniel 7 we are careful to note is *not* the same “little horn” of Daniel Chapter 8. *That* little horn was the historical Antiochus Epiphanes – who in his *deeds* foreshadows the still future little horn of Chapter 7 – the Antichrist. Antiochus Epiphanes was the king of the Seleucid kingdom – the kingdom of Syria, which lay to the north of Israel during the days of the Greek Empire after Alexander’s death).

Verse 25 tells us that the little horn will **speak great words against the most High**, and shall **wear out the saints** of the most High (Israel), and think to **change times and laws**. We remark again, that the prophecy of Daniel 7 especially brings into view the saints of God and it has a judicial perspective to it. In this, it is distinct to the parallel prophecy of the Great Image in Daniel 2, which never mentions the saints of God and has a secular perspective.

The duration of the little horn’s iniquity will be 3½ years. “They shall be given into his hand until **a time and times and the dividing of time**” (Dan 7:25). This is the time of **Jacob’s Trouble**, the last half of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week – the Tribulation. After this he will be destroyed.

The saints are again brought before us in connection with the Second Advent. “The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (v 27). This is a marvelous sequel to the fulfillment of the unconditional promise given to Abraham’s seed. “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” (Gen 22:17). We do not read of such blessing in Daniel Chapter 2.

Figure 1 illustrates the beasts and the Gentile empires of Chapter 7 associated with the first and second night visions.



### Another kingdom – the third and fourth visions

Chapter 7 also contains a revelation of the **final** (and 5<sup>th</sup>) kingdom on earth, the **Millennial Kingdom**. It parallels the prophecy of the “stone,” which becomes a mountain and fills the earth” given in Daniel 2. This kingdom follows the revived Roman Empire of the Antichrist or little horn, who comes into power during the Tribulation. It is not a Gentile kingdom, because it will be ruled by Christ, identified here as the **Son of man** and the **Ancient of Days**.<sup>1</sup> Again, we note the distinctive judicial perspective of the prophecy of Chapter 7, conveyed here by the strong official symbolism. Judgment is about to be unleashed upon the little horn and his dominion (vv 11-12). The “books” are opened (v 10). What these books are, Daniel does not say – but we can conclude they are used in the prosecution of judgment.

We have the judicial and millennial glory of the Son of man. “And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (v 14).

<sup>1</sup> In Daniel 7:9 the *description* of the One called the Ancient of Days (God) is applied without qualification to the One referred to as the Son of man in Revelation 1:13-14. Since the Son of man in Revelation is none other than Jesus Christ, He is also the Ancient of Days. The Son of man and the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 are of the Godhead. In verse 13 the title refers to God the Father, proving equality between the Father and Son, yet with verse 7 it serves to distinguish between these two Persons of the Godhead.