

Daniel 7:15-28 (Part I)

Introduction

Over our last three weeks in Daniel 7, we've seen four great beasts coming up out of the great sea (1-8); we've seen the Ancient of Days taking His seat, and the court sitting in judgment and the books being opened and the beast being destroyed and given over to be burned with fire (9-12); and last week we saw one like a son of man coming to the Ancient of Days and being presented before Him and being given everlasting dominion, glory, and a kingdom (13-14).

But now we have to ask a question: *When* do all these things happen? And what does it all mean for us, today, living in 2020? Of course, Daniel wasn't so concerned with *when* (he knew that all of this vision was still in the future), but he was deeply concerned with what all of this would mean for God's people.

I. Daniel 7:15–18 — As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. “These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.”

That's it. That's the “interpretation.” That's what really matters. Having come up out of the raging sea, the beasts *always* seek to destroy God's new creation; they *always* seek to devour God's redeemed people. But in the end, the tables are turned and the beasts are destroyed and the saints of the Most High receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom not just for a time, but forever, forever and ever. So I think of those simple words of Paul in Romans chapter twelve:

□ Romans 12:12 — Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

We learn from the angel that the four beasts that arose *out of the sea* represent the evil, spiritual powers that stand behind four kings (or kingdoms) that arise *out of the earth*. Looking back, now, from our vantage point, we can see that these four kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (see the descriptions in vv. 4-6 and the commentators).

So *when* will the saints of the Most High receive the kingdom? The simple meaning of the angel's interpretation is that they'll receive the kingdom immediately after the fourth beast (Rome) has been judged and destroyed. It's simple: four great kingdoms—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—followed by the everlasting kingdom of God which is given to the saints of the Most High (cf. Daniel 2). But living as we do long after the Roman empire has already fallen, we feel a tension here that Daniel never would have felt. The four great beasts have come and gone. *Or have they?* And yet the saints still haven't received the kingdom. *Or have they?* But while we wonder about this, Daniel's wondering about something else.

II. Daniel 7:19–22 — Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints [lit. the “holy ones”] and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints [holy ones] of the Most High, and the time came when the saints [holy ones] possessed the kingdom.

At various other places Daniel identifies the three kingdoms of Babylon (2:37-38), Medo-Persia (8:20), and Greece (8:21) which tells us that the fourth beast and the fourth kingdom must be Rome. *It was the Roman Empire* that was exceedingly terrifying, with teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and that devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. *It was the Roman Empire* that grew ten “horns” and *it was the Roman Empire* that then grew an eleventh “horn” that made war with the saints and prevailed over them until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom. Once again, we see the simple order. *Four* kingdoms—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—followed by the saints inheriting and possessing the kingdom forever. And once again, we admit there’s a tension here.

But Daniel isn’t so much interested in the names of empires or in the exact order of things as he is in what will happen to the “holy ones.” He sees the holy ones being devoured and broken in pieces and stamped out, and even though he knows how the story ends he still feels overwhelmed with a sense of dread (cf. v. 28). Not dread for himself, but for his brothers and sisters who hadn’t even been born yet and for whom he already cared so deeply. Even though Daniel knows the ending, it doesn’t make the suffering before that end any less terrible or any less painful. So what about that fourth beast? And what about the ten horns? And what about the little horn with eyes and a mouth speaking great things?

As we read, now, the angel’s second answer to Daniel’s more specific question we have to always remember the first answer to Daniel’s simpler question – *four* kingdoms *followed* by the saints of the Most High receiving the kingdom and possessing the kingdom forever, forever and ever. Never mind the tension, for now. So we read in verse 23:

III. Daniel 7:23 — Thus he said: “As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.”

There’s nothing new here (cf. v. 19). And certainly no comfort for Daniel.

The fourth kingdom (Rome) will be different and more terrible than the first three. Or maybe we could say it like this: This fourth beast will be more satanically inspired than the first three beasts. While the first three beasts were still on God’s leash, as it were, this fourth beast will appear to be let off the leash completely. But this is the very thing that caused Daniel so much

distress in the first place. How can these things be? And *what about the holy ones?* The angel continues in verse 24:

IV. Daniel 7:24a — As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise...

The first thing we have to remember is that these horns belong to the fourth beast (Rome) and so these ten kings must be Roman kings or Roman emperors who were still in the future for Daniel, but are now in the past for us. So, then, who are—or who were—these ten kings?

In the Bible, there are three numbers that can be used symbolically to represent “completeness.” The number “four” can be used this way (cf. “four horns” and “four craftsmen,” Zech. 1:18-21; “four chariots,” 6:1-5; “four living creatures,” Rev. 4:6; “four horsemen,” 6:1-8) in light of the four compass points of the earth (cf. the four winds of heaven [Jer. 49:36; Ezek. 37:9; Dan. 7:2; 8:8; 11:4; Zech. 2:6; Mat. 24:31; Rev. 7:1], the four corners of the earth [Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2; Rev. 7:1; 20:8]). So we saw in chapter two that the “four kingdoms” in Daniel symbolically represent the whole of fallen human history – from the time of Daniel until the end of the age. And yet even with this powerful symbolism there’s also a “literal” connection here with the four kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. In other words, there’s *both* a symbolic *and* a literal side to the “four kingdoms” in Daniel 2 and also here in Daniel 7. Are you seeing this? This is really, really important to remember. I think we can say the same thing about the ten horns—or the ten kings—here in verse 24. Just like the numbers four and seven (cf. the creation week and Israel’s sabbatical calendar; Deut. 28:7, 25; Ruth 4:15; 1 Sam. 2:5; Job 5:19; Ps. 12:6; 119:164; Prov. 6:16; 9:1; 24:16; 26:16, 25; Eccl. 11:2; Isa. 4:1; 11:15; 30:26; Jer. 15:9; Dan. 3:19; 4:23; Mic. 5:5; Zech. 3:9; Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:1; 8:2; 10:3; 15:1), the number ten is often used in the Bible not literally, but to symbolize “completeness” (cf. multiples of ten; Dan. 7:10).

- Genesis 31:7 — Your father has... changed my wages **ten** times.
- 1 Samuel 1:8 — Am I not more to you than **ten** sons?
- Nehemiah 4:12 — The Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us **ten** times, “You must return to us.”
- Ecclesiastes 7:19 — Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than **ten** rulers who are in a city.
- Cf. Lev. 26:26; Num. 14:22; Job 19:3; Dan. 1:20; Amos 6:9; Zech. 8:23; Rev. 2:10

We know that “apocalyptic” is full of symbols – and especially symbolic numbers (cf. Dan. 7:9-10; Zechariah; Revelation). So when we see that the “fourth” beast in Daniel’s vision has “ten” horns representing “ten” kings arising out of the Roman Empire, we have to take seriously the possibility that “ten” is symbolic of the whole and complete number of kings that will come from the Roman Empire before that “eleventh” king—or the “little horn”—finally makes his appearance. Horns, in the bible, are a symbol of strength (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 75:4-5; 92:10; Jer. 48:25; Mic. 4:13), so picture a beast with *ten* horns! The number “ten” symbolizes the longevity, and the power and might and glory of this fourth kingdom.

But just like the “four kingdoms” can be understood to have both a symbolic and a literal meaning, so also the “ten kings” can be understood to have both a symbolic and a literal meaning. The Roman Republic officially ended when Julius Caesar became the “dictator” of

Rome in 49 BC. Even though Julius Caesar wasn't technically the first Roman Emperor, historically he was still viewed as the first "king" of Rome. In order, the nine emperors that followed Julius Caesar (for a total of ten) are: Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian. Could these be the ten horns of the beast – the ten horns that arise out of the Roman Empire?¹ We read in verse 24:

V. Daniel 7:24b — As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

Once again, we have to remember that this "little horn" arises in the days of the fourth beast – in the days of the Roman Empire (cf. Dan. 7:11). So whoever the horn may be I believe there must be at least some sense in which he's already come and gone. But what about the three kings that the little horn "puts down"? If the number "ten" has a symbolic meaning, then we can also see a symbolic meaning in the *three out of ten*. What is the effect on us when we see the little horn putting down three kings? The effect is scary. We see the dominance and the great power and might—or perhaps the cunning—of this horn. As another example of this, we read in Revelation chapter twelve:

□ **Revelation 12:3–4** — Another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

The point isn't that exactly 1/3 of the angels in heaven fell with Satan in his rebellion. Neither is the point that exactly 1/3 of the stars were literally cast down to the earth. The imagery is just meant to communicate the power and might of this huge dragon – in the same way that the uprooting of three horns communicates the power and might and cunning of this final, "little horn" that grows to be greater than all the others (cf. 7:20).

But is it also possible that the "little horn" will put down three historically identifiable kings? If we continue with our list of Roman "kings" the eleventh in the list—coming right after his father, Vespasian—is Titus; and before Titus was emperor, he was the Roman general who besieged and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. If Titus is the "little horn," then the fact that that he was only a "general" (and then "only" the son of the Emperor) during his campaign against Israel might explain why he's called the "little" horn. On the other hand, it was actually Titus who was most instrumental in bringing his own father to the throne (Titus was the first Roman Emperor to reign after his biological father). Titus may have been "little," but he wielded a massive amount of power. So now the question is: Did Titus really "put down" three of the kings who came

¹ The text does not require us to assume that all ten (or "eleven") of the horns were all *ruling* at the same time (though that certainly could have been the case; cf. 8:22). When Daniel says that the "little horn" came up "among" the "ten" (v. 8) and that the little horn had "companions" (v. 20), he's telling us what he *saw*—he's simply describing the scene in front of him. We should be careful not to press the imagery too far. Remember that *all together* the ten horns represent the great power of the beast; so it's only natural that we don't see one horn coming up, and then being broken off and followed by another, which is subsequently broken off and followed by another, and then another, and another, and so on. To require that kind of thing from a vision would be to fail to understand the "flexibility" of this symbolic imagery.

before him? The year 69 A.D. is famous as “the year of four emperors” – Galba, Otho, and Vitellius were the first three and there was constant civil war in Rome. But in the end it was Vespasian, *through the labors of his son Titus* (the future eleventh king of Rome) who succeeded in navigating this time of civil war so that it ultimately resulted in the defeat of the previous *three* emperors and his own enthronement as the new emperor of Rome. With Vespasian being the tenth king of Rome and the previous three emperors all defeated, could it be that his son, Titus (the real power behind the throne), can now be seen to be the “little horn” of Daniel chapter seven? We go on to read in verse 25:

VI. Daniel 7:25a — He shall speak words against the Most High,

As far as Titus was concerned, the Jerusalem temple was still a symbol of the true God, “the God of Israel.” So when Titus burned and leveled the temple this was an ultimate act of arrogance and blasphemy. The following quote is woven together from various Jewish sources and is somewhat exaggerated and fanciful, but it’s almost certainly based in some truth.

“Vespasian sent Titus who mocked, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in whom they sought refuge?’ (Deut. 32:37). This was the wicked Titus who blasphemed and insulted Heaven. What did he do? He entered the Holy of Holies and with his sword slashed the curtain. Through a miracle blood spurted forth and he thought he had killed God Himself... He began to speak blasphemies and insults against Heaven, boasting ‘One who wars against a king in a desert and defeats him cannot be compared to one who wars against a king in his own palace and conquers him.’” (Judah Nadich, *The Legends of the Rabbis*)

The Jewish historian, Josephus, describes what happened after the Romans entered the city:

“And now the Romans... upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; **and there did they offer sacrifices to them** [the imperial cult], **and there did they make Titus imperator** (a title usually reserved for the emperor), with the greatest acclamations of joy.” (War; 6.316)

It would appear that Titus accepted divine worship from his soldiers even within the very courts of the temple in Jerusalem (the Roman historian, Suetonius (c.a. 100 A.D.), says that the soldiers wanted to make Titus emperor). “While on his way back to Rome... the *Babylonian Talmud*... records [that] Titus issued the following boastful challenge to the God of Israel: ‘If he is really mighty, let him come up on the dry land and fight with me.’” (Gittin 56b) It seems safe to say that Titus truly was a man who, more than any of the kings who came before him, spoke words against the Most High. But the angel explains further:

VII. Daniel 7:25b — He... shall wear out the saints [lit. the “holy ones”] of the Most High,

Who are the holy ones that the “little horn” wears down? From Daniel’s perspective, this could be a reference to the Jewish nation as a whole – including even rebellious and unbelieving Jews.

- Deuteronomy 14:2 — You are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

There's a sense in which the people of Israel were the "holy ones" simply because God had set them apart for Himself, and we certainly know that Titus "wore out" and "prevailed" over the people of Israel in the unspeakable horrors of his campaign in Israel and finally in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Samuel Krauss writes in the Jewish Encyclopedia (1916) article on Titus: "In Caesarea in Palestine, in Caesarea Philippi, and in Berytus he forced the captive Jews to fight against wild animals and also against one another; and many thousands more were slain to please the revengeful Syrians and Greeks." The cruelties and terrors associated with the siege and destruction of Jerusalem are too horrible to even describe here. I don't know how many believers there were among these suffering Jews, but Titus wouldn't have worried about distinguishing between the unbelieving Jews and the Christian Jews. The 4th century Christian historian Severus (perhaps "quoting" the 1st century Roman historian Tacitus) writes this:

"Titus *is said to have* first summoned a council and deliberated whether or not he should destroy such a mighty temple, for some thought that a consecrated shrine, which was famous beyond all other works of men, ought not to be razed to the ground. Their argument was that to preserve it would bear witness to the moderation of Rome, while its destruction would forever brand her as cruel. Others, however, including Titus himself, opposed this view and said that the destruction of the Temple was a prime necessity in order to wipe out more completely the religion of the Jews and the Christians; for they urged that these religions, although hostile to each other, nevertheless sprang from the same sources; the Christians had grown out of the Jews: if the root were destroyed, the stock would easily perish."

History has shown us how wrong Titus was, but Jesus was very clear that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. would be a time of intense and even unprecedented trial and suffering *for His own disciples* (cf. Mat. 24:15-27). And so it was. And once more we see how Titus seems to fit perfectly this prophecy in Daniel of the "little horn." The angel explains further:

VIII. Daniel 7:25c — He... shall think to change the times and the law;

The word for "times" is a reference to the appointed "days" and feasts in Israel (cf. NRSV; HCSB; NLT; the related Hebrew word appears only seven times in the OT: Neh. 10:34; 13:31; Esther 9:27, 31; Ezra 10:14; Neh. 2:6; Eccles. 3:1) and so the "law" is probably the law *concerning these times* (cf. NET) or other laws connected with Israel's worship. Once again, the point is how presumptuous and arrogant this "little horn" is in trying to take for himself a prerogative that belongs only to the one true God.

But how was this fulfilled? It's possible that the "little horn" will only "*think*" to change the times and the law, but not actually be successful. Other translations use words like "intend," "try," "attempt," and "hope." There are others who offer historical evidence that Titus did "change" Israel's religious calendar.

After Jesus ascended into heaven many of the Jewish *Christians* still worshipped at the temple and even observed many of the “times” and “laws” associated with the temple. They didn’t do this legalistically (requiring that Gentile believers should do the same thing), but as an expression of their devotion to the Lord. In those first days of the Jewish church and while the temple was still standing, this was only natural.

- Acts 2:46 — Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.
- Acts 3:1 — Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.
- Acts 21:20–26 (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20; Rom. 15) — [The leaders of the church in Jerusalem said to Paul,] “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all **the Jews** who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. **But as for the Gentiles** who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

The temple was still a symbol for the Jewish Christians of their saving God and so there were many who still observed the times and laws associated with the temple. There were also many Jews, however, whose *legalistic* worship at the temple was an expression of their rebellion against God and their rejection of Jesus, the Messiah. And so it was God’s will, in the end (for this reason and others), that the temple should be destroyed – even the temple where many of the Jewish Christians had still gathered for worship. When Titus destroyed the temple, the times and the law that had been associated with that temple were changed forever. So why does it say that the little horn would “*think*” to change the times and the law? I believe this highlights his arrogance in supposing that these were all his own plans that he would accomplish by his own power and might when, really, he was just the rod that God was wielding and the staff that God was lifting (cf. the Assyrians in Isa. 10:5-15). He shall think (or purpose) to change the times and the law, and indeed, he shall succeed, but only because God has sent him. It is still only *God* who changes the times and the law. The angel continues, now:

IX. Daniel 7:25d — ...and they [the holy ones] shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

A right understanding of this very unique expression (“a time, times, and half a time”) is so very important. Notice that the angel doesn’t say “a year, years, and half a year.” Even if the meaning is “years,” we still have to ask why the angel doesn’t say “years,” but instead, “time, times, and

half a time.” In verse 12, Daniel says that the lives of the first three beasts were prolonged for a season *and a time*, but no one says that “time,” here, is a reference to one year. In Daniel 4, the watcher decrees that Nebuchadnezzar will have his portion with the beasts of the field until “seven times” pass over him (4:23). The watcher does not say “seven years.” He says “seven times.” The point is that this is an indefinite period of time that will only come to its *completion* (“seven times” symbolizes completeness; cf. Dan. 3:19) when Nebuchadnezzar is ready to acknowledge that the Most High rules the kingdom of men (4:25; cf. 4:34a). It should be obvious to all of us that “time, times, and half a time” is a very *non*-specific expression – which leads us to wonder *why*. What is the symbolic meaning here? And yet remember how the four kingdoms and the ten horns and the three horns all have *both* symbolic *and* literal interpretations? Could it be that the same is true here?

Next week we’ll come back to the symbolism of this expression. Right now we just ask if there’s some way that this could have been “literally” fulfilled in the days of Titus. Titus began his campaign against Israel in March of 67 A.D. During this time, many Jews were slaughtered or taken captive and the people were severely oppressed (for example: Roman soldiers seized the crops of the Jewish peasantry). It was exactly three and a half years later, in September, 70 A.D. that the city of Jerusalem fell. In one Jewish midrash (*Midrash Rabbah* Lamentations 1.31 and 1.40), “Vespasian was expected to be punished in Gehenna for three and a half years because that was the length of time in which he besieged Israel.” And now, finally, the angel concludes:

X. Daniel 7:26–27 — But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

Remember the simple meaning of the angel’s first interpretation (7:17-18): Four great kingdoms—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—followed by the everlasting kingdom of God which is given to the holy ones of the Most High. And now we’re back, again, to the tension – a tension that Daniel never would have felt, living when he did. The four great beasts have already come and gone. *Or have they?* The little horn has already come and gone. *Or has it?* And yet the saints still haven’t received the kingdom. *Or have they?* Maybe the solution to this tension lies in the symbolism of that expression, “a time, times, and half a time.” And maybe, too, the solution to this tension lies in understanding just *when* the Son of Man was presented before the Ancient of Days and just *when* the holy ones receive the kingdom.

Conclusion

Next week, we’ll see the resolution of this tension, and what all of these things truly mean for us. For right now, I want to close by pointing out something wonderful that we’ve been seeing this morning and that we’re going to see a whole lot more of in the next five chapters of Daniel. It is God who writes history, and who is still writing our history today. It is God who knows tomorrow, because He is the one who ordained tomorrow. And it’s this same God who sent his only Son to die for us and who is working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28-30). And so we ought to be encouraged in these days, and every day, with these words:

- Isaiah 44:6–8 — Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”

Let us wholly rest ourselves, therefore, and hide ourselves in the God who not only knows the future, but who holds it—**and us**—in His hands.