

## Daniel 7:15-28 (Part II)

### Four Beasts, Ten Horns, and a Little Horn

Remember the four great beasts coming up out of the sea (1-8)? Remember 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)? Remember the one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven, being presented before the Ancient of Days, and receiving everlasting dominion, glory and a kingdom (13-14)? Have we “*seen*” these things? Daniel approached one of the angels who stood by and asked him the *truth* concerning these things. And the angel answered:

- Daniel 7:17–18 — 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.

*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. Once again, 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 Daniel wants to know more:

- 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 holy ones and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones possessed the kingdom.

We know that the fourth kingdom represented by the fourth beast is 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.

### Historical fulfillment

Last week, we saw that Julius Caesar was known historically as the first “king” of Rome. For thirteen years he shared the rule of Rome with two others (Pompey and Crassus), but in the end he finally emerged as the sole dictator/king of Rome for one year before he was murdered (44 B.C.). After Julius Caesar, his nephew Octavian again shared the rule with two others (Antony and Lepidus) until he also emerged as the sole leader of Rome (29 B.C.) and finally became the first emperor of Rome (Augustus; 27 B.C.). Octavian saw himself as Julius Caesar’s successor and he chose to emphasize this by taking the name “Caesar” for himself (Augustus Caesar), and

then eventually designating his heir by adopting him and giving *him* the name “Caesar.” After this, the Roman Emperors were all “Caesars” (except for the ninth emperor, Vitellius, who ruled for just a few months) because they all counted themselves the successors of Julius Caesar, the first “king” of Rome. So could the first ten kings (or the first ten “Caesars”) of Rome be the ten horns of the beast – the ten horns that would arise *out of the Roman Empire*?

The eleventh king (or the eleventh “Caesar”) was Titus, and we saw last week that before he was king he was the one who was most instrumental in bringing his own father to the throne in the famous “year of the four emperors.” It was Titus who navigated this time of civil war so that after the defeat of the previous *three* emperors, his father was established on the throne as the founder of a new dynasty (the Flavian dynasty). With Vespasian being the tenth king of Rome and the previous *three* kings 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 before which *three* of the previous horns were plucked up by the roots (7:8)? We saw last week that it was Titus who invaded Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. We saw last week that he was *pre-eminently* one who spoke words against the Most High, who wore out the saints of the Most High, and who thought to change the times and the law (7:25). We also saw that the holy ones were given into his hands for exactly three and a half years – from the beginning of his invasion of Israel in March of 67 A.D. to the fall of Jerusalem in September, 70 A.D. (a “literal” fulfillment of “time, times, and half a time”; 7:25).

#### **“This generation will not pass away”**

Now aside from the fact that this all “fits” very nicely (as long as we’re not being too “rigid” with this apocalyptic and symbolic language), why should we believe that these things really are the fulfillment of Daniel’s vision? I believe the most important answer is because our Lord Himself told us so. After specifically mentioning the abomination of desolation “spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (Mat. 24:15) Jesus says this:

- Matthew 24:34 — *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*

This isn’t an apocalyptic or symbolic saying. This is about as straightforward as anyone could possibly get. We must interpret “this generation” “*literally*.” “This generation” refers to that specific generation of the Jewish people alive in Jesus’ day. Everywhere else that we see this phrase used in Matthew, it always refers to that specific generation of the Jewish people alive in Jesus’ day (cf. Mat. 11:16).

- Matthew 12:41 (cf. 12:42, 45) — The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with **this generation** and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah *is here*.
- Matthew 23:34–36 — I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between

the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon **this generation**.

According to Jesus, the abomination of desolation spoken of in Daniel 9 (which I believe is the same thing as the “little horn” here in Daniel 7) would be fulfilled before the generation of his own day had passed from the scene. And then to underline the certainty of this fact, Jesus added:

➤ Matthew 24:35 — Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Brothers and sisters, we can be confident that Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled—as He said it would be—in Titus’ invasion of Israel and his siege and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. – *before the generation of Jesus’ day had passed from the scene*. And then I believe that Jesus makes it clear in the rest of his teaching that the destruction of Jerusalem would be the *last* prophesied *specific event* before His second coming. In other words, after the destruction of Jerusalem, His return truly would be “imminent” – coming “at any time” (cf. Mat. 24:32-33, 36-51; 25:1-13). If you want to see the full explanation of all these things you can read or listen to the sermons on Matthew 24 and 25 posted on our website.

### **Tension!**

This is all very simple and clear. And yet it still brings us back to that “tension” that we left off with last week. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the “little horn” was not destroyed. Titus went on to become the eleventh “king” of Rome and then there were many more “kings” or emperors of Rome who followed after him. Rome, itself, wasn’t destroyed for another four hundred years. So what’s the answer to this riddle? This week, we’ll look at the first *half* of the answer.

### **The beasts that rise out of the sea—the kings that rise out of the earth**

Remember how the four beasts that all arise out of the great sea represent the evil spiritual powers that stand *behind* the kingdoms of this world. In Daniel chapter ten, we hear how the angel that was talking with Daniel was fighting against the prince of the kingdom of Persia and how he was helped by Michael, the prince over God’s people, and how the prince of Greece was coming (Dan. 10:13, 20-21). On the one hand, the beasts represent specific historical kingdoms, but they do this only in so far as what they really represent is the *spiritual powers* that stand behind those kingdoms. Remember, that’s the whole point of all this apocalyptic language. That’s why we’re not allowed to translate this “strange” apocalyptic language into the plain language of the newspaper. The beasts rise out of the sea (7:3). The kings rise out of the earth (7:17). The fourth beast is not *just* the equivalent of Rome, but rather it represents Rome as the evil spiritual power that’s standing behind Rome. This whole chapter isn’t *primarily* about human empires. It’s about the raging sea, and the beasts that rise from out of the sea and that we see “embodied” and manifested at various times in the various kingdoms of this world.

It’s in this same light that we have to understand the horns on the fourth beast. These horns are a *part* of the apocalyptic imagery – which means that they ultimately represent something more than just historical kings. The horns picture the kings as tools of the beast; as tools of the

spiritual “rulers and authorities” (Col. 2:15); as tools of “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). And so there’s a major sense in which what the horns really represent are the evil spiritual powers behind these kings. We see this especially in that last “little horn” which has eyes “*like*” the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things and that makes war with the saints and prevails over them. The point isn’t primarily Titus, but rather the evil spiritual powers that are standing behind Titus and behind the Roman empire as a whole. The point isn’t just Titus, but rather the supremely anti-*God*—and therefore the anti-*Christ*—spirit that animates him and motivates him. This is the whole point of the apocalyptic language in Daniel chapter 7.

In light of his arrogant and blasphemous destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, Titus may be the last specifically prophesied anti-God, anti-Christ historical figure, but we know that that anti-God and anti-Christ spirit that animated and motivated him (that little horn with eyes “*like*” the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things) is still in the world today. Today, even the Roman Empire is long gone, but the evil, spiritual power that animated and motivated that empire (the “beast”) is still in the world even now (cf. Revelation). And we see these realities hinted at for Daniel, and now more fully revealed to us, in the “symbolism” of “a time, times, and half a time.”

### **“A time, times, and half a time”**

On the one hand, we see how “a time, times, and half a time” is fulfilled in the three and a half years of Titus’ conquest of Israel and his destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (a year, two years, and half a year). But on the other hand, we’re not *allowed* to simply translate “time, times, and half a time” into “year, years, and half a year.” That’s not what the angel said, and there’s a reason for that. We saw last week that the whole point of saying “time,” is to avoid saying “year” – or “month,” or “week,” or “day” (“a season and a time” [7:12]; “seven times” [4:25]). Therefore, the whole point of saying “time” is to avoid giving the idea that we can actually calculate exactly how long the saints will suffer and be persecuted by this anti-God, anti-Christ spirit that animates and motivates the various kings and kingdoms of this world. The three and a half years of Titus is certainly *a* fulfillment of Daniel’s “time, times, and half a time,” but the fulfillment is not exhausted in this. It can’t be, because “time, times, and half a time” is purposefully intended to be an indefinite expression with an ending date that cannot be fixed by us. If the saints will suffer at the hands of Titus for three and a half years, then we know now that the saints will suffer at the hands of the anti-God, anti-Christ spirit that animated and motivated Titus—and even the Roman empire itself—for a much longer, *indefinite* period of time. Though Daniel might have wondered about these things in his own day, we can see and understand these things clearly today.

But now we have another question. If the whole point of this expression is to be indefinite, then why is it so specific: “A *time, times, and half a time*”? There are three numbers in the Bible that can be used symbolically to represent “completeness.” We saw two of these last week: “Four” (in light of the four compass points of the earth) and “ten” (or the multiples of ten; e.g. 1000, 10,000). The third number is “seven,” probably because of its association with the seven days of God’s creation week (cf. Israel’s sabbatical calendar).

➤ Ruth 4:15 — Your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than **seven** sons...

- 1 Samuel 2:5 — The barren has borne **seven**, but she who has *many* children is forlorn.
- Psalms 12:6 — The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace... purified **seven** times.
- Proverbs 9:1 — Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her **seven** pillars.
- Daniel 4:23 — Let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till **seven** times pass over him.
- Revelation 4:5 — Before the throne were burning **seven** torches of fire, which are the **seven** spirits of God.
- Cf. Deut. 28:7, 25; Job 5:19; Ps. 119:164; Prov. 6:16; 24:16; 26:16, 25; Eccl. 11:2; Isa. 4:1; 11:15; 30:26; Jer. 15:9; Dan. 3:19; Mic. 5:5; Zech. 3:9; Rev. 1:4; 5:1; 8:2; 10:3; 15:1

There is a sense in which we can say that seven is the “perfect” number. So what is “three and a half”? It’s the perfect number—the number of completeness—cut in half. In other words, the whole point of that expression “time, times, and half a time” is on the one hand that it’s indefinite and on the other hand that it won’t go on forever. To the contrary, in the end the period of suffering and persecution will seem like nothing compared with the everlasting kingdom that the saints will receive forever, forever and ever (cf. 7:18). We see another example of this symbolic use of “three and a half” in Revelation chapter eleven:

- Revelation 11:9 — For **three and a half** days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb.

On the one hand, the *image* is literally three and a half twenty-four hour periods. On the other hand, the ultimate meaning and fulfillment is not three and a half literal twenty-four hour periods (84 hours), but rather the comparative shortness and *incompleteness* of this time that the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stood before the Lord of the earth will lie dead in the streets of Sodom and Egypt (cf. Rev. 11:3-8).

So now there’s only one question left to ask: If the point is “*three and a half*” times, then why doesn’t the angel say “*three and a half* times”? Why does the angel say, instead, “a time, times, and half a time”? This only emphasizes all the more that though the time may seem to us to be long, it will be cut short in the end (a time, then times, and then suddenly not just a time, but a time cut in half). It’s indefinite, but it won’t go on forever. It’s indefinite, but it *will* be cut short. And then the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom **forever, forever and ever**.

### **Putting it all together...**

There is no “gap” in Daniel’s vision. In other words, Daniel’s vision doesn’t “cut out” and then cut back in again thousands of years later when the Roman empire suddenly appears again on the scene before the second coming of Christ. Daniel’s vision takes us all the way to Titus in 70 A.D. and then it continues on, uninterrupted, even beyond that, all the way to the second coming of Christ and the final day of judgment. Titus may be the last specifically prophesied anti-God, anti-Christ historical figure, but we know that that anti-God and anti-Christ spirit that animated and motivated him (that little horn with eyes “*like*” the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great

things) is still at work in the world today. In the same way, today even the Roman Empire is long gone, but we know that the evil, spiritual power that animated and motivated that empire (the “*beast*” that rose out of the sea) is still prowling in the world even today. The three and a half years is over, but we’re still living *today*—even *right now*—in the time, times, and half a time of Daniel’s vision.

## Conclusion

And so we read in John’s first epistle:

- 1 John 2:18 — Children, it is the *last* hour [there is no last hour after the one we’re in], and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so *now* many antichrists have come. *Therefore* we know that it is the last hour.

John’s point here is not that there is still a *specific* future antichrist coming at the end of the last hour, but that the last hour is here and therefore the antichrist, too, is already here (John sees the [spirit of the] antichrist at work within the context of the church). We see Jesus using a similar expression in John’s gospel:

- John 5:25 — Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour **is coming**, and **is now here**, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.
- John 4:23 — The hour **is coming**, and **is now here**, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Going back to 1 John, we read:

- 1 John 2:22 — Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

There were already many anti-God figures in the Old Testament. In the coming chapters of Daniel, we’ll see that Antiochus Epiphanes was one such supremely anti-God figure *before* the coming of Christ who typified and foreshadowed that final “little horn” that we’ve seen here in Daniel chapter seven. But once Christ came, and once he had been raised up from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father, the anti-God spirit that had been active ever since the fall became, by default, the spirit of anti-Christ. It’s this anti-Christ spirit (embodied in many antichrist figures) which is “*the antichrist*” who is to come – and who is now in the world. John writes again:

- 1 John 4:3 — Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming **and now is in the world already**.
- 2 John 7 — For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is **the deceiver and the antichrist**.

Brothers and sisters, there are many different ways that we’re called to *understand* these times in which we live, but one important way is to see that we’re living, today, in the “time, times, and half a time.” We’re living, even now, in that “last hour” when the antichrist has already come and is now here. And so if there’s one thing this makes very, very clear to us, it’s that we

shouldn't ever be surprised at any amount of persecution and suffering that we're called to endure *in this time*. We shouldn't be surprised at any amount of false teaching in the church or any persecution that we're called to endure even at the hands of the professing church itself. Instead, knowing these realities of suffering and persecution and false teaching—knowing the realities of the “time, times, and half a time”—we ought to be all the more earnest in *confessing* each and every day of our lives that Jesus is the Christ and that He has been sent from the Father and that He has come in the flesh. Knowing the reality of the antichrist, today, we ought to beware, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, our thoughts should ever be led astray from a sincere and pure *devotion* to Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3). Knowing the reality of antichrist in the world today, we ought to be all the more diligent to, *in our hearts, sanctify Christ as Lord* – Lord over me, over us, Lord over all (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). And we can be strengthened and encouraged to do this knowing that while the time may seem to us to be long, it will be cut short in the end; it will not go on forever.

- Revelation 6:9–11 — When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, **how long** before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest **a little longer**, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

A time, times, and half a time—and then the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.