

Daniel 7:15-28 (Part IV)

Introduction

We've seen a lot so far in Daniel chapter seven: A raging sea; four great beasts; the fourth beast having ten horns and then a little horn (see chart on p. 8); and then the Ancient of Days and the final judgment; and one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven. Different Christians have approached the fulfillment of all these things—and especially the *timing* of this fulfillment—in different ways, but no matter how you choose to approach it, you're always going to be confronted with a "problem." If the four beasts represent *at one level* the four kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, then how can the final judgment and the saints' inheritance of the everlasting kingdom of God be said to follow immediately after these four kingdoms? The Roman empire fell over fifteen centuries ago, and yet here we still are. The difference between the various interpretations of Daniel 7 really just comes down to how we seek to resolve this tension.

This morning, I want to start out by presenting three different views. I'm going to try to do this simply and clearly, and also in a way that will be edifying to you – in a way that will ultimately cause you to rejoice in the wonderful *truths* of God's Word. I do this because I believe that each one of you as true Christians should be willing and diligent to grapple with God's Word out of a sincere desire to understand it rightly – and live your lives accordingly. I have no interest here in academic discussion or trivial points of interpretation; but what we should be interested in is a faithful and a deepening understanding of God's Word. So what are these three different views on how to resolve the tension in Daniel 7?

I. The "GAP" View (Dispensationalism)

On the one hand, there's what I'll call the "gap" view. There are some who believe that the ten horns of the fourth beast, and the little horn, and even in some sense the fourth beast itself are all still to come at the very end of this age in a "great tribulation" that has not yet begun. *In this way*, it's easy to see how the saints can receive the kingdom immediately following the destruction of the "little horn" and the fourth beast (cf. 7:21-22, 25-26) But the question is, how did we get there? How did we get all the way to the very end of this age?

This view requires that we insert a "gap" in the middle of the fourth beast – between the time of the Roman empire in Jesus' day and the time when the Roman empire appears again on the scene sometime in the future (a revived Roman empire; see chart on page 9). In other words, this view "chops" the fourth beast in half and puts its hindquarters in history and its "amputated" head and shoulders still somewhere in the future. (You might remember that the same kind of gap is inserted in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image that was crushed by the stone cut out from the mountain.) The obvious difficulty here is that the fourth beast is clearly portrayed as a single whole exercising *uninterrupted* rule and dominion until the Ancient of Days comes. Just like the *four* metals in Nebuchadnezzar's dream image (Dan. 2), the *four* beasts here in Daniel 7 don't *just* represent four historical empires; they also symbolize the *whole course* of fallen human history until the end (cf. chart 1 on page 8). 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.

So if *Daniel 7* seems to forbid cutting the fourth beast in half and inserting into the middle of it a gap of at least 2000 years, then what other biblical grounds could there be for taking such a course of action? Those who hold to this “gap” view believe that God has two separate plans for two separate peoples. They believe that this church age—and even the church itself—is something of an “unexpected” interruption or parenthesis in the plan that God has been working out for Israel. Sometime in the future, God will take the church out of the world via a secret rapture and then with the church gone He’ll pick up again with His plan for Israel as His special, chosen people. Since Daniel’s visions only had to do with the future of Israel, this view argues that we must insert this entire parenthetical “church age” as an unforeseen interruption or “gap” in Daniel 7.

While I very much love and respect my brothers and sisters who hold to this view (perhaps you’re one of them), I nevertheless believe that this view is fundamentally contrary to, and even fundamentally undermines the very *heart* and *soul* of the New Testament (and of the Old Testament). So let’s rejoice now, for a moment, in these truths. The New Testament teaches us that the *believing remnant* of Old Testament Israel has become the “true Israel” under the New Covenant (Rom. 9:6-7; 11; Mat. 3:9-12) and also that as Gentiles, we have now been grafted in with this believing remnant of Israel (Rom. 11) so that we’re actually part of the “commonwealth” of Israel and co-heirs with the believing remnant of the Jews of all Israel’s covenants of promise (Eph. 2:11-22). In other words, the Bible teaches that it’s in this New Covenant community of the church that all of Israel’s covenant promises are coming to their *fulfillment*. The church is not an unexpected parenthesis temporarily interrupting God’s plan for Israel. The church is the birthright of the believing remnant of OT Israel, and now also of us believing Gentiles so that all of us—Jews and Gentiles together—are now one in Christ as the true children of Abraham – the true Israel of God – the people of the covenant (Rom. 4; Gal. 3:26-29). Once we come to see these things and rejoice in them—once we deny that the church is an unexpected parenthesis temporarily interrupting God’s plan for Israel—then we’re left without any biblical warrant at all for inserting any gap into Daniel’s vision. We have to put the beast back together.

II. The “STRETCH” View (Traditional Reformed)

There are others who avoid a gap by, instead, “stretching” the fourth beast in some way so that the little horn can still come at the very end of history (see chart on page 9). In this way, the little horn can still be followed immediately by the final judgment and the second coming of Christ. Sinclair Ferguson writes:

“Although the beast is destroyed [the Roman empire has fallen], all that it represented appears to live on *in the ten horns* [representing the times we’re living in now] and to reach a climax *in the little horn* [the final antichrist figure at the end of history].”

Do you see how Ferguson stretches the fourth beast by means of the symbolism of the ten horns so that it ultimately covers this entire age until the second coming of Christ? Ferguson (and others) hold to this view (or to a variation of this view) because of what they believe the New Testament teaches about a final period of suffering and persecution that the church will experience at the hands of a final antichrist figure immediately prior to the second coming of Christ. Though I am much more sympathetic to this view—and though I usually agree with the people who hold it—this view cannot take seriously Jesus’ words to His disciples in Matthew 24 (typological interpretations are excluded by the clear force of Jesus’ words):

- **Matthew 24:34** — Truly, I say to you, *this generation [the specific generation of Jews living in Jesus’ day] will not pass away* until *all* these things take place [“all these things” including the “abomination of desolation” and the little horn spoken of in Daniel; cf. Mat. 24:15].

This view, with its very recognizable antichrist at the very end of the “last hour” cannot take seriously these teachings of Jesus in Matthew 25:

- **Matthew 24:36–39, 44** — But concerning that day and hour no one knows... For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

According to Jesus, that first generation of His disciples would live to see the day when—after the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and the temple—the coming of the Son of Man could happen at any moment and would even come at a time they didn’t expect, when life was in many ways just “life as usual.” It’s this truth that I believe as Christians we ought to rejoice in. Each day that we live, we ought to live in the joyful knowledge that our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13)—the *Parousia*, the appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—could be today. But according to the “stretch” view, the coming of Christ can’t happen “at any time” because the signs that Jesus told His disciples to look for within their own generation still haven’t all been fulfilled some 2000 years later. For these reasons (and some others) I cannot stretch the fourth beast so that the coming of Christ would still be impossible today because we know that the “little horn” has not yet appeared. I cannot stretch the fourth beast so that we could essentially be “expecting” and “predicting” the coming of Christ once we see that “little horn” arrive on the scene.

III. The “*PAST HISTORY*” View (Full Preterism)

So if we don’t insert a “gap” in the fourth beast and if we don’t “stretch” the fourth beast, then what other option do we have to make sense of this passage in Daniel? There are some who, instead of “skipping” or “stretching” into the future would tell us that the “future” is already **completely** here (see chart on page 10). In other words, according to this view even the *second coming* of Christ and the *final* judgment have already happened, and did happen within that first

generation of Jesus' disciples. Believe it or not, these "past history" people really are trying to make sense of what could appear to be the meaning of many passages in Scripture, but in the process (just like the gap view and just like the stretch view), they're forced to ignore or twist many other passages of Scripture. But unlike the "gap" and "stretch" views, this "past history" view is the only one that ends up in heresy because it denies the future physical and bodily return of Christ to this earth to bring redemptive history to its glorious consummation. I'm reminded of when Jesus was lifted up from the disciples as they were looking on and how a cloud took him out of their sight, and how while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said:

- **Acts 1:11** — Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

And the Apostle Paul writes:

- **1 Thessalonians 4:15–18** — For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

It is this physical and bodily return of Christ to this earth in great power and glory—it is this future second coming of Christ, *and not death*—that is the Christian's true and ultimate hope; and all who deny *this* hope are false teachers and must be cast out of the church. There is still a final judgment and reward that's "not yet."

IV. The Strengths of the "GAP," "STRETCH," and "PAST HISTORY" views

Having said all these things, I do believe that all three of these views have some elements of truth in them. The "gap" view rightly emphasizes the "anytime-ness" of Christ's appearing. The problem is that the gap view preserves this Scriptural teaching by applying it not to Christ's second coming, but rather to a "secret rapture" when God removes the church from this world so that He can return to working out His separate plan for Israel. While I reject this *application* because I don't see it taught anywhere in Scripture, I do wholeheartedly agree with this emphasis on the Bible's teaching of imminence and "anytime-ness."¹

The "stretch" view, on the other hand, rightly emphasizes the symbolism of apocalyptic literature and the importance of understanding how the "already" and "not yet" play into the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (cf. typology).

¹ "Imminence" can simply mean "soon," but it can also include the idea of "any time now." I will be using "imminence" as a synonym for "any time now."

Finally, I believe that the “past history” view is right in so far as much of Daniel’s vision *was* already fulfilled within the first century and even the first generation of Jesus’ disciples (the ten “Caesars” followed by the “little horn,” Titus).

If we take the positive contribution of each one of these views (“anytime-ness,” symbolism, the “already” and “not yet”, and the historical fulfillment in the 1st century) and combine all these things together I believe we can end up with a much more *biblically faithful* interpretation of Daniel 7.

V. The “IMMINENCE” View

According to Jesus’ teaching, ever since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., we’ve been living in the age of “any time now” – in the age of imminence. In other words, I believe Jesus was teaching us that there is no other specifically prophesied historical event that stands now between us and the second coming of Christ in power and glory on the clouds of heaven. And it’s this age of “any time now”—it’s this age of imminence—that’s naturally “compressed” (speaking anachronistically) in all of the Old Testament prophecies *and* in all of the New Testament writings that predate 70 A.D. Except for the writings of the Apostle John and possibly Jude, the entire New Testament was penned before the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. These NT writers knew that Jesus would *not* return before the destruction of Jerusalem, but they also knew that the destruction of Jerusalem would occur within their own lifetimes – *after which* the coming of Christ would truly be “imminent.”² So think about it: How can you really measure or “quantify” this period of “any time now”—this period of imminence—when for all the first disciples knew it might last no time at all, or just a day, or a week, or maybe even a month – or 2000 years? Can you see, then, why this period that’s characterized by imminence and “anytime-ness” would always be “compressed” so that in the Old Testament—*and* in the New Testament writings *that predate 70 A.D.* (2 Thess. 2:1-12)—the coming of Christ and the final judgment of the beast is always presented (or pictured) as following “immediately” after the “abomination of desolation” and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.? Really, how else *could* it be pictured? It follows immediately after because there may be no time in between, or there may be one day, or a week, or a year in between, or there may be 2000 years in between, or longer; but however short or long it may be, ever since day one it could always be said: “**any time now.**” It’s only natural, then, that we read in Daniel chapter seven:

- **Daniel 7:21–22** — As I looked, this horn [Titus and/or the evil spiritual power that stood behind Titus] 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.
- **Daniel 7:25–26** — He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

² It’s impossible for us to overestimate the epochal significance of the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Mat. 24:1-3, 34).

I'm not inserting a "gap," here, where we assume that Daniel's vision has skipped the entire church age; I'm simply assuming that it's impossible for Daniel's vision to quantify or measure what we can see now are the days of imminence.

VI. The Overlap of the Ages in these Days of Imminence

Writing before the destruction of Jerusalem, it was certainly possible that Christ would return immediately after the three and a half years of Titus' war against Jerusalem and the "great tribulation" and the abomination of desolation in 70 A.D. And yet we've already seen that Daniel seven never required this. The "time, times, and half a time" was fulfilled at one level in the days of Titus, but it also left wide open the possibility of a longer, indefinite period of time that could extend *into these days of imminence*. The apocalyptic language of the "sea" and the "beasts" and the "horns" left open the possibility that the spiritual powers represented by these images might continue on in the world for an indefinite period of time even after Titus and the Roman Empire had passed from the scene (*during these days of imminence*).

At the same time, even as we see how the "time, times, and half a time" is extended indefinitely into the future (so that we're still living even today in the "time, times, and half a time"), we also saw last week how the climactic, end time realities of the final judgment and the saints' inheritance of the kingdom have effectively and powerfully already arrived with the resurrection and ascension of Christ to sit enthroned at the right hand of God. If the "time, times, and half a time" extends into the future *until* that day when the beast is finally judged and the saints receive the kingdom, then we can also see how the future has already reached into the present in so far as the beast has *already* been judged and the saints have *already* received the kingdom.

Can you see, here, the overlapping of the ages? On the one hand, we endure the trials and sufferings of this present age (time, times, and half a time), and on the other hand, we've tasted already the victory and the triumph and all the powers of the age to come. And it's in the midst of all this—with the future reaching into the past and the past still reaching into the future—that we remember that all of these "overlapping" days in which we find ourselves living are also the days of imminence – the days of knowing that our blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—may be "at any time now" (Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28). (See chart on page 10) When we understand these days in which we live as the days of imminence—when the past is still reaching into the future [faded lion] and the future has already reached into the past [Final Judgment "Already"]—then I believe the tension in Daniel seven is wholly resolved and we can be enabled to faithfully understand the truth of this vision.

Conclusion

Remember that except for (most?) of the writings of John (and possibly Jude), the entire New Testament was penned before the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It's in light of this that I think we can better understand verses like these.

- **Romans 13:11–12 (57 A.D.)** — You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For **salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand.**
- **1 Corinthians 7:29 (55 A.D.)** — This is what I mean, brothers: **the appointed time has grown very short.** From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none...
- **Hebrews 10:25 (65 A.D.?)** — ...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more **as you see the Day drawing near.**

Paul could say that the appointed time had grown very short and the writer of Hebrews could see the day drawing near because the generation of Jesus' day would soon be passing from the scene and Jesus had said that "this generation" would not pass away until "all these things" took place. Paul and the writer of Hebrews could also see the signs of the times – they could see that all the things Jesus said would take place *in the last days* were being fulfilled even then.

- **2 Timothy 3:1 (68 A.D.; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1)** — But understand this, that in **the last days** there will come times of difficulty.
- **James 5:3 (45 A.D.?)** — Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in **the last days.**
- **2 Peter 3:3 (68 A.D.; cf. Jude 18)** — ...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in **the last days** with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

In context, Paul, James, and Peter are each assuming that the last days had already arrived.

Because the generation of Jesus' day was coming to its end, and because of the signs of the times, and because Jesus had said that after the destruction of Jerusalem his coming would truly be imminent, therefore, James and Peter can say:

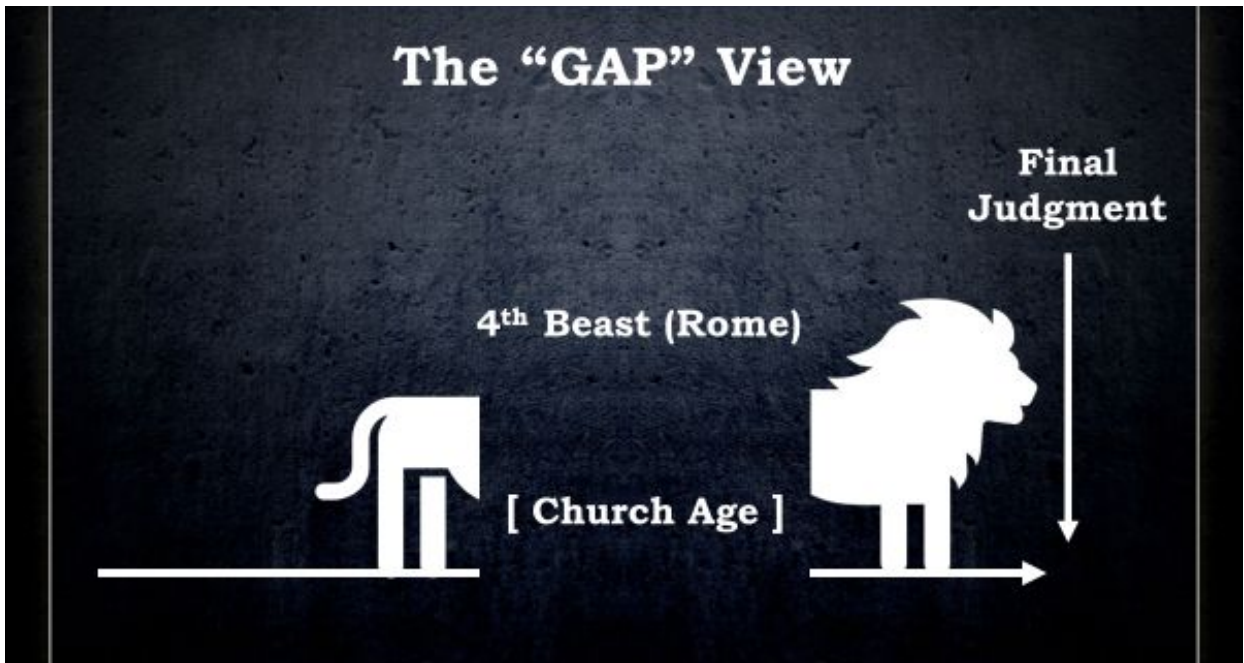
- **James 5:8–9 (45 A.D.?)**; cf. Phil. 4:5) — Establish your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord is at hand.** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, **the Judge is standing at the door.**
- **1 Peter 4:7 (65 A.D.)** — **The end of all things is at hand;** therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

The Apostle John is the only New Testament writer that we know wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D (probably some thirty years after). It's in this light that we can understand how John can speak of the antichrist having already come and of many antichrists being even then in the world (cf. 1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7). It's also in this light that we can understand why John speaks not of the "last *days*" (like Paul and James and Peter), but instead, of the "last *hour*."

- **1 John 2:18 (95 A.D.?)** — Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

For John, living and writing thirty years after the last prophesied event of the destruction of Jerusalem, the days of imminence had come, and therefore, it was, even then, the very last hour. Therefore, for us who have tasted already of the age to come even as we live still in the time, times, and half a time, it is, even today, the very last hour. How, then, should we live?

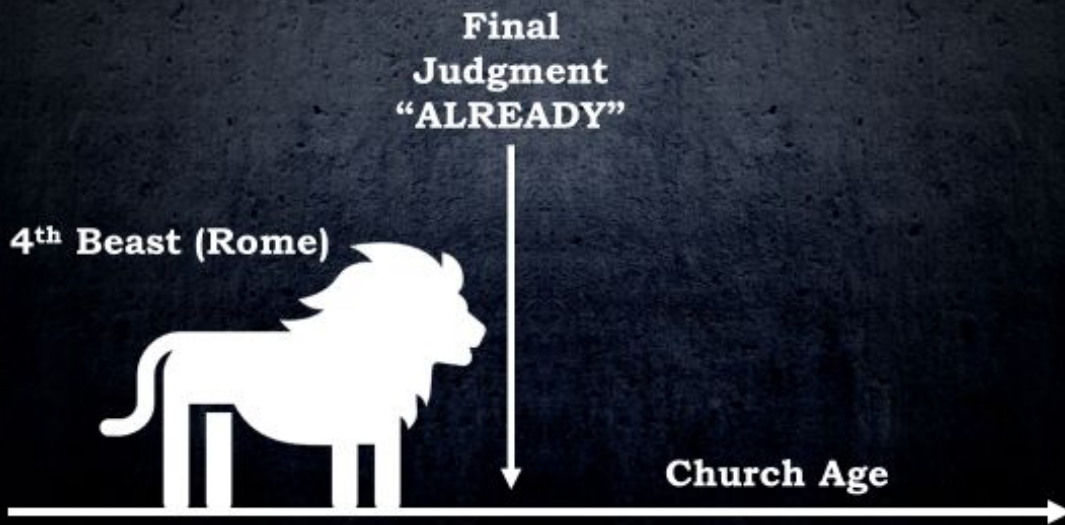
- **Matthew 24:42** — **Stay awake**, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
- **Matthew 24:44** — Therefore you also must **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.
- **Matthew 25:13** — **Watch** therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.
- **Romans 13:12–14** (cf. 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Heb. 10:23-25) — The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.



The "STRETCH" View



The "PAST HISTORY" View



The "Imminence" View

