

# The Four Beasts and the Everlasting Kingdom

*Daniel Chapter 7 · May 15, 2013*

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## A Review of the Chapter

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This evening we returned to the beginning of Daniel chapter 7 for a reading of the whole, before pressing on to what remains in its closing verses. The chapter opens in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon — that is, during the closing period of the first of the four great Gentile kingdoms. Daniel saw four great beasts arising out of the sea: a lion with eagle's wings, a bear raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth, a leopard with four heads and four wings, and a fourth beast dreadful and terrible beyond all the others, with ten horns, from among which arose a little horn with eyes and a mouth speaking great things.

Then the scene shifts to the heavenly court — the Ancient of Days seated, with a stream of fire before Him, thousands upon thousands ministering to Him, and the books opened. The little horn is slain and the beast destroyed. And then, one like a Son of Man comes with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, and to Him is given an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away — a kingdom that shall not be destroyed.

*And there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. And his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. — Daniel 7:14*

The rest of the chapter records Daniel's distress at the vision and his request for interpretation, the answer concerning the four kingdoms and the saints of the

Most High, the details of the fourth beast, the little horn's war with the saints, the judgment that sits, and the final establishment of the kingdom.

## **The Saints of the Most High Places**

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The phrase 'saints of the most high places' occurs repeatedly in this chapter — in verses 18, 22, 25, and 27 — and it bears careful examination. It refers to those on earth who, in a coming day after the rapture of the heavenly saints, acknowledge the authority of the Most High and refuse to bow to the beast. They are worn out by the little horn, and they suffer greatly during that period. But at the end, judgment is given in their favour and they possess the kingdom.

It is important to understand that this phrase does not refer to the same company as the New Testament church. The 'most high places' has an affinity with the 'heavenly places' of Ephesians, in that it speaks of the one acknowledged — but these saints are on earth, not in heaven. They are identified chiefly as God's earthly people, Israel, in that time of trial.

In verse 27, a distinct phrase appears: 'the people of the saints of the most high places.' This would appear to distinguish the earthly people themselves from those who are more broadly counted as the saints during that time, including those who had not acknowledged the beast and had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus Christ, as Revelation 20 further unfolds.

## **Two Distinct Companies**

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The great truth emerging here is that God has two peoples — a heavenly people and an earthly people. This was not revealed through Daniel; it was hidden, a mystery, until it was disclosed through the Apostle Paul. Daniel understood that the Lord had saints; he did not understand that they would be divided into a heavenly company and an earthly company.

The argument for the distinction is made clearly from Matthew 25. When the Son of Man comes in glory with all the angels, He separates the sheep from the goats among all the nations. If the rapture and the appearing in glory were the same event, there could be no sheep left on the earth to be separated from the goats — they would have gone home with the Lord at His coming. The fact that there are sheep on earth when the Lord appears in glory proves the distinction: a gap exists between His coming to receive His heavenly people and His coming to establish His kingdom. Those sheep who remain on earth at the latter moment are God's earthly people.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then shall he sit down upon his throne of glory, and all the nations shall be gathered before him, and he shall separate them from one another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. — Matthew 25:31–32*

Paul's language about 'the mystery of Christ and the church' is instructive here. He says it was hidden from ages and from generations — it was not revealed before the apostolic age. Therefore, Daniel knew nothing of it. When he speaks of saints, he is speaking of those who belong to the Lord in a general sense; the precise distinctions became clear only later, in the light of the full revelation of the New Testament.

## **The Times and Seasons — Not the Saints — Given Into His Hand**

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Verse 25 closes with the words, 'and they shall be given into his hand until a time, and times, and a half time.' The natural reading might suggest it is the saints who are given into the hand of the little horn — but a careful look at the grammar, and at the context, shows that 'they' refers to the seasons and the law. The times and the appointed holy days are given into his hand for three and a half times — that is, for the duration of the tribulation the offerings and holy days will cease.

This matters greatly, because we have the word of the Lord in John 10: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them life eternal, and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of my hand.' No one can pluck the saints from the hand of the Lord or from the hand of the Father. The affliction of the saints during that time is genuine and severe; but they are never out of the Lord's hands, any more than Job was ever out of the Lord's hands when Satan was permitted to afflict him.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them life eternal, and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of my hand. — John 10:27–28*

What Satan could do to Job was exactly and only what the Lord allowed. Nothing more was possible. And so it is with every child of God in every age: the unpleasant things that come to us are things the Lord has permitted, because we are in His hands. This is not merely a doctrine for difficult times — it is the very foundation of peace. All things work together for good to those who are the called, according to His purpose.

## **The Character of the Four Kingdoms**

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The four kingdoms that dominate the prophetic history of this chapter were identified historically as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. But in Daniel 7 they are not described as metals in a glorious statue, as they were in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of chapter 2. They are described as beasts. The difference is telling.

The statue was Nebuchadnezzar's vision — the way man sees himself and his empires: magnificent, imposing, golden. The beasts are God's vision of the same kingdoms — their true moral character. Each is wild, devouring, and predatory. The moral source of their character is given in verse 17: they arise 'out of the earth.' They are earthly in their nature, earthly in their character.

The coming kingdom will be of a completely different order — everlasting, established by the Son of Man from heaven, and of a moral quality no earthly empire has ever approached. Where the four kingdoms arose from the churning masses of humanity, this kingdom will come from above. Where the four kingdoms failed and passed away, this kingdom will never be destroyed.

## **From the Kingdom to the Eternal State**

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Daniel's vision concludes with the establishment of the everlasting kingdom. That was, in one sense, as far as the revelation given to Daniel reached. It was the hope of Israel: the Messiah coming to establish His kingdom. But the New Testament fills in what Daniel could not have seen — that the kingdom itself will last a thousand years, and that beyond it lies the eternal state.

In the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21, we read not that 'righteousness reigns' but that 'righteousness dwells.' The distinction is significant. When righteousness reigns, there is enforcement, judgment, the restraint of evildoers. When righteousness dwells, no such enforcement is needed, because nothing is present that requires it. That is the eternal state — when the words of John the Baptist are fully realised at last: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.'

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein righteousness dwelleth. Wherefore, beloved, as ye wait for these things, be diligent to be found of him in peace without spot and blameless. — 2 Peter 3:13–14*

The effect these truths had on Daniel was not intellectual satisfaction but moral grief. His thoughts troubled him, and his countenance was changed. Real people will pass through the great tribulation. Real people will face the judgment of the great white throne. Knowing the terror of the Lord, we ought to persuade men — with urgency, with compassion, with the realisation that none of us deserved anything other than what the lost will receive, and that it is only by grace that we

stand.

May the things that are coming move us not to speculate but to worship, not to puff us up with prophetic knowledge but to humble us before God, and to be found blameless and without spot in peace before Him.

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