

The kingdom is given to one like a son of man in verses 13-14, but to the “holy ones of the Most High” in verses 18 and 27. The “holy ones” here are not angels because they are identified as “people” in verse 27. The one like a son of man is the ruler of the holy ones, God’s faithful and persevering remnant, and just as a king is identified closely with his kingdom and people in this chapter, so the son of man receives the kingdom on behalf of God’s people. This corresponds well with prophecies in Isaiah and elsewhere of the future preeminence of Israel in ruling over the nations in fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham and David.

DANIEL 7 AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

An understanding of Daniel 7 is necessary for correct interpretation of many New Testament passages. When Jesus used the term “son of man” to describe himself, he intended to communicate his true identity to faithful Jews while hiding it from Romans not conversant with the Hebrew Scriptures. By using the term, Jesus not only pointed to his humanity (an issue that was hardly at question to those who saw him) but indicated that he was the divinely chosen one to be the ruler on the throne of David over God’s kingdom on earth. Yet he also used the term when communicating to his disciples that though he was God’s messiah, he would suffer and die (a reality better understood from Isaiah’s prophecy). Yet at the end of his first advent, Jesus clearly pointed to the day when he would come on the clouds of heaven to receive his kingdom (Matt 26:64; Mark 13:26; Acts 1:9-11).

Daniel 7 is also foundational for understanding important concepts in John 3:13; 5:25-27; 12:34; Acts 7:56; Phil 2:9-11; 2 Thess 2:3-12; and Rev 1, 5, 13, 17, 19.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How does knowing the ultimate future affect your priorities? In what areas does your life *not* reflect God’s will for this world?

How should you think about suffering in light of the teaching of this chapter?

DANIEL 7: THE COURSE OF WORLD HISTORY FOUR KINGDOMS, A HORN, AND THE SON OF MAN

THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL 7

The Lord reveals that the future course of world history culminates with a blasphemous ruler who is destroyed before the establishment of God’s everlasting kingdom on earth (7:1-28).

OUTLINE OF DANIEL 7

- II. The Lord will protect his people and destroy arrogant kings until the establishment of his kingdom (7:1–12:13).
 - A. The Lord reveals that the future course of world history culminates with a blasphemous ruler who is destroyed before the establishment of God’s everlasting kingdom (7:1-28).
 - 1. Daniel sees a vision of four beasts and one like a son of man who is given the eternal kingdom by the Ancient of Days (7:1-14).
 - a. Daniel sees four great beasts arise from the sea (7:1-3).
 - b. The first beast is a lion with wings of an eagle (7:4).
 - c. The second beast is a bear in the midst of conquests (7:5).
 - d. The third beast is a leopard with four wings and four heads (7:6).
 - e. The fourth beast is terrifying and powerful, conquers everything, and has ten horns and a boastful one that arises afterwards (7:7-8).
 - f. The divine court appears with the Ancient of Days on the throne (7:9-10).
 - g. The boastful horn is destroyed while the other beasts continue to live (7:11-12).
 - h. One like a son of man is given the eternal kingdom by the Ancient of Days (7:13-14).
 - 2. Daniel’s dream is interpreted (7:15-28).
 - a. Daniel seeks the interpretation for his dream (7:15-16).
 - b. Summary: The four beasts are four kingdoms, but the saints will possess the kingdom forever (7:17-18).
 - c. Inquiry: The fourth beast and its eleven horns are a future unique kingdom, and a unique king will persecute the saints before his power is destroyed and God’s kingdom is established forever (7:19-28).

THE SIGNIFICANT POSITION OF DANIEL 7

Though the author of the book has obviously intended to organize his work into a chronologically sequenced narrative section (chapters 1-6) followed by a chronologically sequenced vision section (chapters 7-12), the two parts are also tightly linked together by means of themes and language.

The use of the Aramaic language, begun in 2:4, continues through chapter 7, concluding a chiasmic arrangement that links chapters 2 and 7, chapters 3 and 6, and chapters 4 and 5. The vision in chapter 7 closely corresponds in meaning to that given in chapter 2, and the use of the same language and the chiasmic arrangement underscores this unity. But chapter 7 is placed at this point, though occurring chronologically earlier (compare 7:1 with 5:30), because it provides a necessary introduction to the remaining visions of the book. Chapter 7 reveals that four kingdoms will exist before the coming of God's kingdom, chapter 8 provides more specific details of two of those kingdoms, chapter 9 gives details of timing, and the final vision in chapters 10-12 builds on the horns in chapters 7-8 to prepare the exiles for two major periods of religious persecution.

By connecting the two halves of the book together, Daniel 7 helps the reader to make associations between two (otherwise quite distinct) sections. The pride of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar should be related to the pride of the horns of the third and fourth kingdoms. The persecution of the saints in chapters 3 and 6 prepares the reader for the persecution under the future horns.

As a bridge between the two halves, Daniel 7 helps the readers to see the *prophetic* significance of the narratives of chapters 1-6 and the *historical* significance of the prophecies of chapters 7-12. The stories of chapters 1-6, while entertaining, are not just for enjoyment but are to help *strengthen believers for the future*. The prophecies of chapters 7-12 are not wild fantasies invented by a Jew in exile but are *history recorded in advance*. Together the whole book comforts God's faithful remnant with revelation that future suffering will give way to the glorious kingdom of God on earth.

BRIEF COMMENTARY ON DANIEL 7

The four great beasts that arise out of the sea picture four successive kingdoms that arise out of the iniquitous earth. Though created by God to rule over the earth and the beasts, the kings and kingdoms of the world have become like beasts themselves.

The first beast is Babylon, and its comparison with a lion and eagle corresponds with Jeremiah 49:19-22. Nebuchadnezzar was shown mercy and raised to his feet when he recognized God's sovereignty.

The second beast is Medo-Persia, and its two sides correspond to the two joined kingdoms which are explicitly identified in 8:20.

The third beast is Greece, appropriately pictured as a winged leopard given the lightning-speed conquest of the world by Alexander the Great (cf. 8:21).

The fourth beast is unlike all the others, noted for its cruelty and ten horns.

When the fourth kingdom is ruling, God Almighty will speak and its wicked ruler will be destroyed. One who is like a man but with divine characteristics is given God's authority to rule God's kingdom for eternity. All peoples will worship this ruler. Faithful readers of this book would have recognized this figure as the son of David predicted in God's covenant with David (2 Sam 7) whose rule will never end and as the one who will establish his lasting rule over the earth despite the opposition of the nations (Ps 2).

The horn that arises comes from the *fourth* beast which must be distinguished from the horn that arises from the *third* beast in chapter 8. Though critical scholars want to see the fulfillment of this passage in the Seleucid dynasty and Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164), history *does not correspond* to the prophecies. A deciding factor for believers is that the kingdom of God did not replace Antiochus Epiphanes. Thus the fulfillment of the horn of the fourth beast is still future. Comparison with New Testament passages makes it clear that this horn is the Antichrist (Matt 24:15; 2 Thes 2; Rev 13, 17).